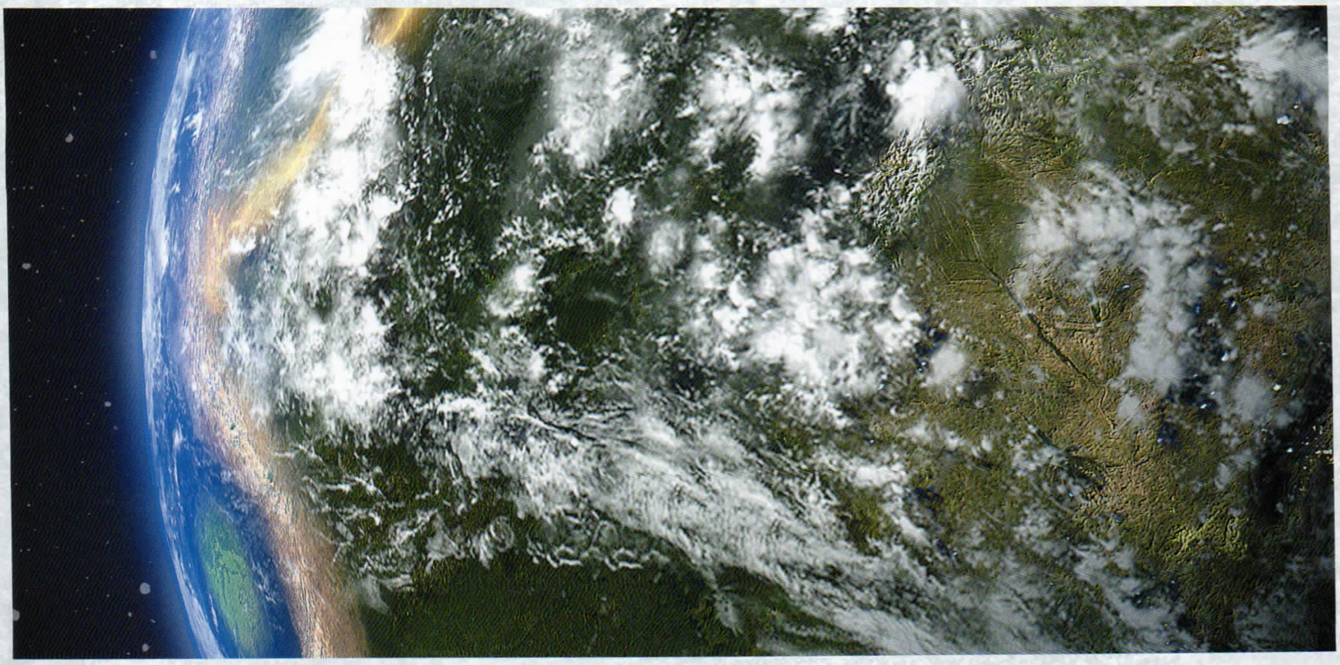
Officer of the Colonial Military

Enclosed is a report detailing the current state of the war in brief as of this, the 500th day since hostilities against the Scourge were opened on Eden Prime. This report may have been redacted to match your security clearance level. Any attempt to disseminate the contents of this report to lower clearance levels will be met with summary court martial. Leaks above level 4 will be treated as high treason and dealt with accordingly.

The report contains sections covering each major theatre of operations. As for all officers, it is vitally important that you keep yourself informed as to the progress of the wider war beyond the specific theatre in which you are deployed. The decisions of your superiors will be vindicated in light of the bigger picture, the greatest war mankind has ever known. If you are temporarily denied troops or resupply, you must accept and understand this, given the wider context of the war. Your part in this endeavour is vital to the very future of our species and only discipline, courage and rigorous application of your training and will see us to victory.

The Colonies thank you for your service. For Mankind, For the Colonies, For Vengeance.
Supreme Martial Yuri T. Zachiev, UCMA

EDEN PRIME



AHQ SITUATION REPORT: EDEN SYSTEM, OCT 19TH, 2671AD, D+500

+++ Classified level 2 - Senate and Ranking UCMA/F Officers Eyes Only +++

SURFACE OPERATIONS – EDEN PRIME

Although the Reconquest Plan as a whole is now in Phase 2, the situation on Eden Prime can be considered to have entered Phase 3. Virtually the entire surface of Eden Prime is now under UCM control with only a few serious enemy concentrations remaining. At this time we have the bulk of the remaining Scourge strength either boxed into the inner precincts of the Southern city of Star Casablanca or contained in the far northern city of New Athens.

Reconstruction and repurposing of the captured assets in New Troy and Romagrad is well underway and Eden Prime should be in a position to positively contribute to the war effort shortly. The UCMA has also begun recruiting for the first Legion to be raised from a recaptured Cradle World, a fighting formation projected to be one of the most elite in the entire military from the moment of its formation due to the toughness and combat experience of its ex-Resistance recruits.

Total victory was projected to have been achieved on the entire planet well over 100 days ago at worst estimates, but unfortunately we have faced a tragic setback. Conquest looked to be all but achieved by the end of June and AHQ deemed the time was right to begin mass lifts of troops from the surface to bolster the Elysian and Shangri-La campaigns as planned.

Shortly after 70% of our strength was removed from theatre, the final assault of Atlantia City began. This frozen and blighted city had been a thorn in our side since the early days of the campaign as the Scourge seemed to have chosen it as a place to make a stand. This was further complicated by the presence of the despotic and feral warlord Salakahn, aided and goaded by agents of the PHR.

The assault was spearheaded by the entire Maganum Second Legion at 80% strength (800,000 men) and two full strength Armoured Corps fresh from Ferrum (200,000 men + vehicle support). The attack was going well through the first few days, as our forces pushed into an ever increasing salient directed at the city centre – the heart of both Scourge and Feral leadership. Our advances in certain sectors was hindered or repulsed by surgical PHR attacks however, which delayed the general offensive by well over 48 hours. Unfortunately, this proved grievously costly.

Intelligence suggests that the PHR forces in league with Salakahn had a mysterious purpose of their own to achieve in the city before we achieved total victory. The alliance between the PHR and the Ferals always seemed unlikely and mismatched, although our spies within Salakahn's court seemed to intimate that the PHR were pulling his strings. Unfortunately, it seems that the ruthless despot had plans of his own. As our forces entered the city centre on the seventh day (June 30th), his twisted plan was unleashed.

As Fleet Command lost all comms with our surface assets in Atlantia, a blinding flash was witnessed from the viewports of our orbiting ships. Seconds later, radiological alarms signalled that something cataclysmic had happened on the surface.The horrifying truth quickly became obvious, as the tortured screams and panic of our outer garrisons blared over the net. Salakahn's forces had detonated a score of subsurface nuclear warheads, virtually levelling the entire city, turning the centre to molten glass and taking almost a million loyal colonial lives in the blink of an eye. Such a monstrous crime will enter the annals of the worst evils our race has inflicted on itself and marks the first use of strategic nuclear weapons in this conflict, not to mention the most casualties we have ever sustained in a single day, over double that of D-Day itself.

It would be a pathetic compensation to learn that Salakahn died along with his plan, but we must doubt that such a selfish survivalist would ever sacrifice his own life. We must assume that he quit the city along with the majority of his lackeys before the atrocity. Indeed, Honorary General Karl Foley was in pursuit of a large column of Ferals fleeing the outskirts at the time of the attack. Although his compassion in turning back to the city to aid in the recovery effort should be commended, it may have allowed the tyrant's escape.

The total annihilation of what must amount to millions of Scourge cannot compensate the United Colonies for the losses sustained on that fateful day. Small comfort that the PHR were dealt payback for being in league with such a snake, as their own forces were reduced to ash alongside ours. Whether they achieved their nefarious purpose before their ignoble demise is unknown at this time.

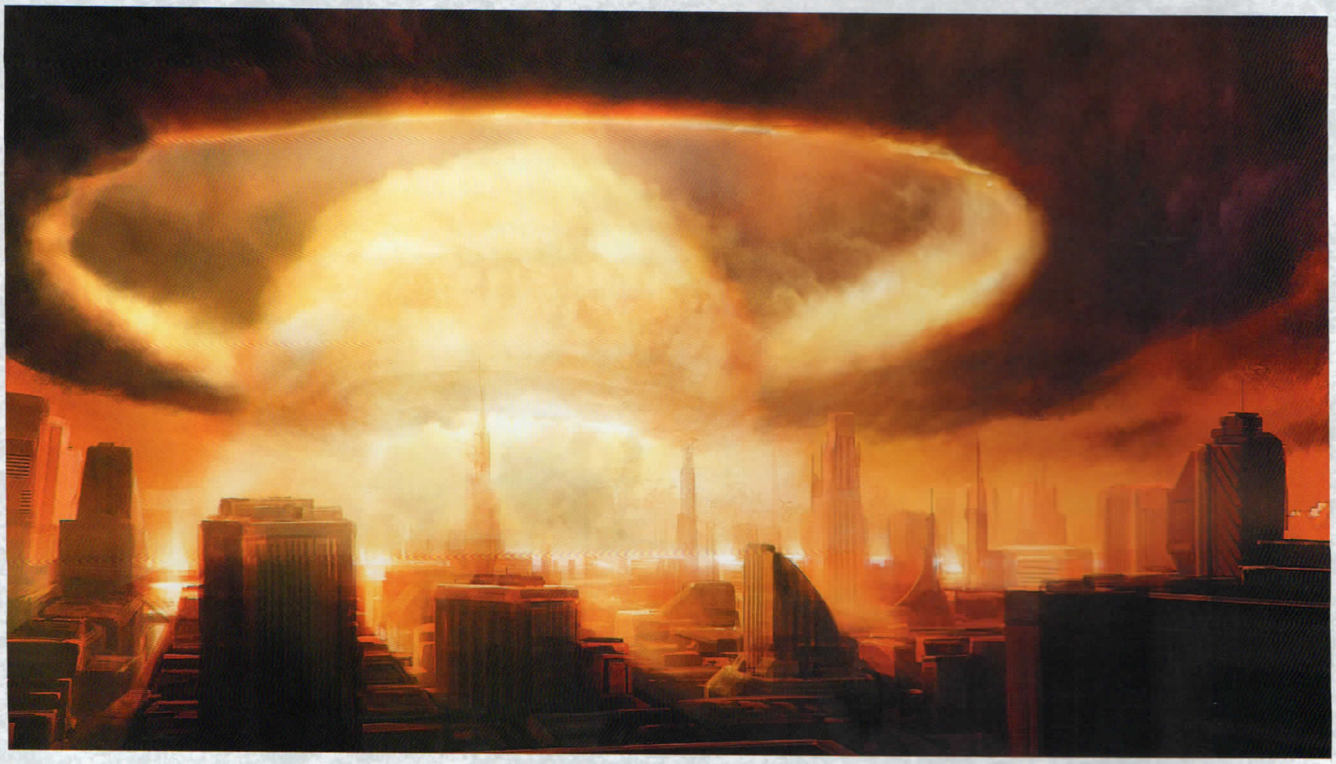
PERSONAL FOOTNOTE:

I apologise for the increasingly emotive language I have used in this section sirs. One should write these reports in the official, detached format but in this case I must fail to do so, as I lost a brave son and daughter to this, the worst atrocity of the war. Yours in grief, Tobias Moran, Senate Records Officer 1st class.

NOTE APPENDED BY REPORT EDITOR JUAN JACOBS:

I chose to make an exception to standards and leave this section in the report intact; such voices highlight the real human cost of this war on a personal level which should not be ignored. RO Moran was relieved of his duty after submission of this, the first section of the D+500 report for convalescence and mourning on Maganum, since he became unable to continue writing. The Senate acknowledges his fine service and hopes to welcome him back soon.

I have enclosed the last eyewitness account we have from our spy (now presumed KIA) in Salakahn's court before the attack. (Side note: The Naval Theory department failed to read between the lines of this account before it was too late, and have been taken to task for this oversight). We believe it indicates that the PHR had no part in the nuclear holocaust in Atlantia. Several conclusions can be drawn from this intelligence, however, it should be noted that given the Republic's customary mastery of manipulation, we can never be truly sure of anything that passes the lips of their agents.



REPORT 16 OF AGENT DELTA 28: EDEN PRIME, JUNE 29TH, 2671AD, D+388

+++ Classified level 2 - Senate and Ranking UCMA/F Officers Eyes Only +++

I stood at my usual place among the Guard in the fetid palace's throne room, the lurking place of Salakahn. I'd killed several men to get to this point, the work of many weeks of necessary savagery. The 'Boss' preferred his bodyguards to be violent, sadistic but sheep-like in their deference to him, a part I'd been perfecting since I entered the palace by way of mutilation many months ago, simply to throw myself at the tyrant's feet.

Casting my eyes around the room more than my 'esteemed colleagues', I spotted the PHR delegation entering. Just as they did so, a deep rumbling passed through the room and a subtle rain of mortar dust fell from the ceiling. My real compatriots were getting closer to the city centre. "Greetings, Great One" intoned Giselle, the delegation's spokeswoman.

"None of that obsequious crap, I thought we'd agreed to be honest with each other" replied Salakahn in his customary quiet but gruff tone.

"Fine. I'll be brief then. A pullout from the centre is impossible at this time. Our mission here is at a delicate and crucial stage... we need but a few more days to..."

"BE SILENT!" Salakahn roared in one of his signature and shockingly abrupt losses of composure - all the more effective due to their scarcity. This gave even the usually unscrupulous post-humans pause. "What you pretty things decide to do from this point on is your business. This city is lost and I am not such a fool to die for your little schemes. The colonial dogs are almost on us and I intend to turn the tables in my own way. This little pact between us has been entertaining, I'll admit, but I am not your pet. Get out of my sight or we'll see if your guts are as shiny as the rest of you."

This bald statement was delivered in decreasing volume but with increasing menace. The tyrant was at his most dangerous at these times and I gripped my weapon more tightly, in anticipation of the total anarchy that would ensue should the delegates turn on us. From what little I'd seen, I had absolutely no desire to fight these people - they are utterly lethal and far faster than we could ever be. A good job we outnumbered them ten to one, and for once in this infiltration I felt glad to be side by side with some of the most craven and twisted killers I'd ever encountered.

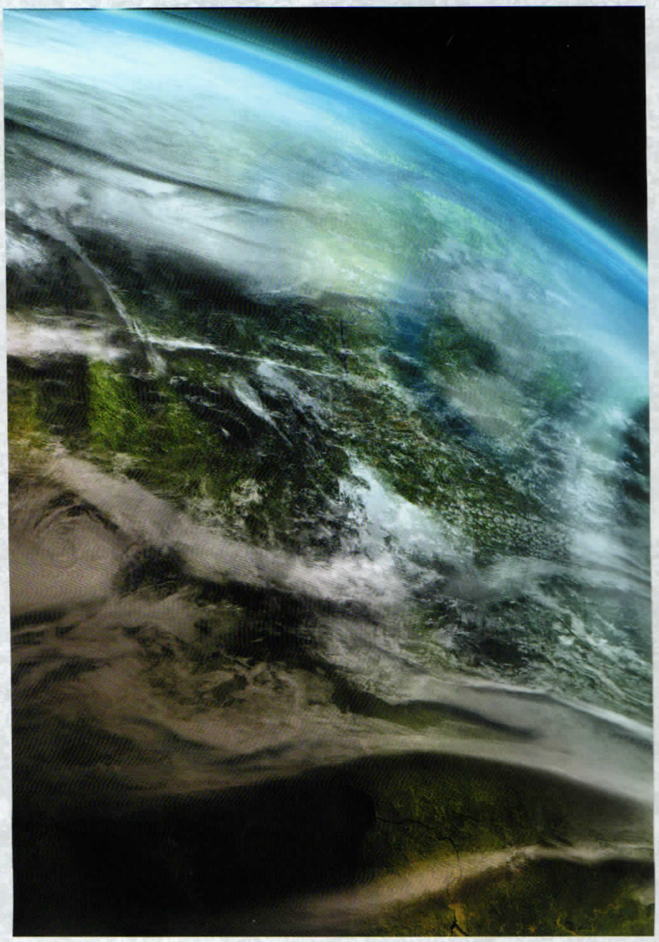
"Farewell for the present then. May we reacquaint ourselves with you in more... even circumstances one day." The delegates gave Salakahn a cursory glance and turned their backs on him in perfect and fluid unison, finally revealing the extent of their disdain for the despot in a moment of what I considered to be pure suicide. Astonishingly, Salakahn merely grunted and let them leave.

Once they had gone, Salakahn turned to the rest of us, "We have more important business to be about now our little friends have left. My 13th Cabal have been busy preparing a small revenge for the Colonials in the past few days. I'm told we're ready to proceed. Kahn, I'd like you to keep six of my Guard here in the throne room with you to maintain a presence while we scarper. One of my doubles will stay here with you. It's crucial that the dogs believe I'm still sitting pretty here for now. Follow in 48 hours, or when they reach the gates."

"Your will," growled Kahn, a man who I'm sure had been resenting his place in the Guard for some time. At last, it seemed, he was getting some genuine responsibility. Perhaps this would make him more loyal in future.

"Ahh... your dedication is a delight to me. A promotion to a higher state will be forthcoming for you soon as a just reward for your loyalty... Now, let's be gone!"

As the tyrant departed, I turned out to be one of Kahn's chosen few to remain. I really had no choice but to stay for the sake of my cover and I now hope to rejoin the court after the retreat is complete. Perhaps I'll learn more of the plan while I'm here. Please ensure this encoded message gets to Naval Theory ASAP. I suggest it's forwarded to Gen. Foley expeditiously also, I know he still has his score to settle and he wouldn't want to miss the chance for pursuit. Delta-28 out.



SURFACE OPERATIONS - SECONDARY PLANETS

Eden VII is the only other planetary body in the system with any enemy presence remaining. While most of the titanium mines here are now under our control after subterranean dropship insertion missions there is still some way to go in securing final victory. It transpires that the Scourge have built a considerable subterranean network of strongpoints in the northern hemisphere that invite an attritional and grinding campaign that we can ill-afford.

After the Atlantia atrocity and the loss of troops to other fronts we have been forced to increase our victory projections into next year. We are simply spread too thinly to commit the kind of numbers needed to finally dislodge the aliens from the last rock in the system.

Given the lack of meaningful human Resistance here, Admiral Kronstein is currently petitioning the High Council to authorise a full nuclear saturation bombardment of the region, since all surface enemy missile halo assets have long since been pummelled into dust by conventional bombardment and no enemy ships remain. It is hoped that with sustained thermonuclear attacks that we can penetrate through to the underground facilities still crawling with Scourge, immolating them in their nests.

ORBITAL OPERATIONS

With all remaining Scourge fleet assets destroyed in the system, fleet actions have been rare. Much of Battlefleet Eden has been transferred to join Battlefleet Olympus for the continuing struggle there. Our picket fleet continues to perform outer marker patrol duties and orbital bombardment fire missions as required.

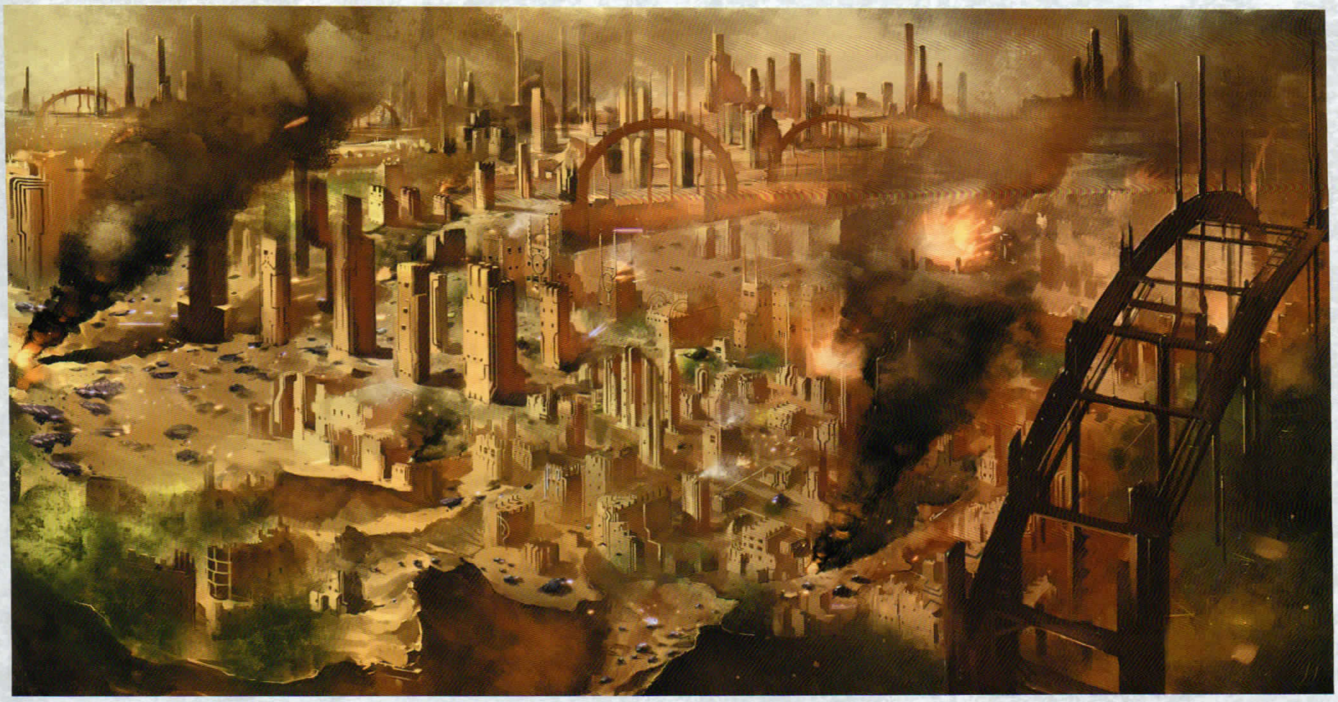
Fleet assets in the system have been kept at 35% above projected levels in order to deal with persistent Shaltari incursions. The Shaltari are sporadically and unpredictably conducting sorties over Eden Prime's northern hemisphere and occasionally over Eden VII, indicating that they still have some goal to achieve there. They are also launching hit and run attacks on our supply convoys and weaker Battlefleet elements.

Their piratical attacks are proving problematic, as we seldom have enough early warning to redirect our ships in time, spread thinly as they are. Losses are, however, within acceptable limits and these actions have amounted to little so far, only serving to keep more ships in system than intended.

PHR incursions are now a lot less common since the destruction of Atlantia, although many small surface extraction runs have slipped through our screen. Admiral Kronstein insists on vigilance and remains on high alert for Republic battlegroups; small wonder, since his own extensive injuries when the Battleship *General Sherman* was crippled by a PHR surprise attack over Eden VII on D+261.

ACTIVE SURFACE BATTLEFRONTS

CITY OF STAR-CASABLANCA



CITY OF STAR-CASABLANCA - EDEN PRIME

The heavy concentration of Scourge armour here is proving increasingly difficult to dislodge. Tank crews continue to dread a posting here since this is a city of narrow avenues and tight corners that play right into the hands of Scourge grav-tanks. Protests, insubordination and even desertion are now commonplace in this sector. Attempts to improve morale and regain the initiative here are underway.

+ + + The following section is redacted from the general report and only included for Classified level 5 or higher versions - High Council, Senior Admiralty and AHQ Staff Eyes Only + + +

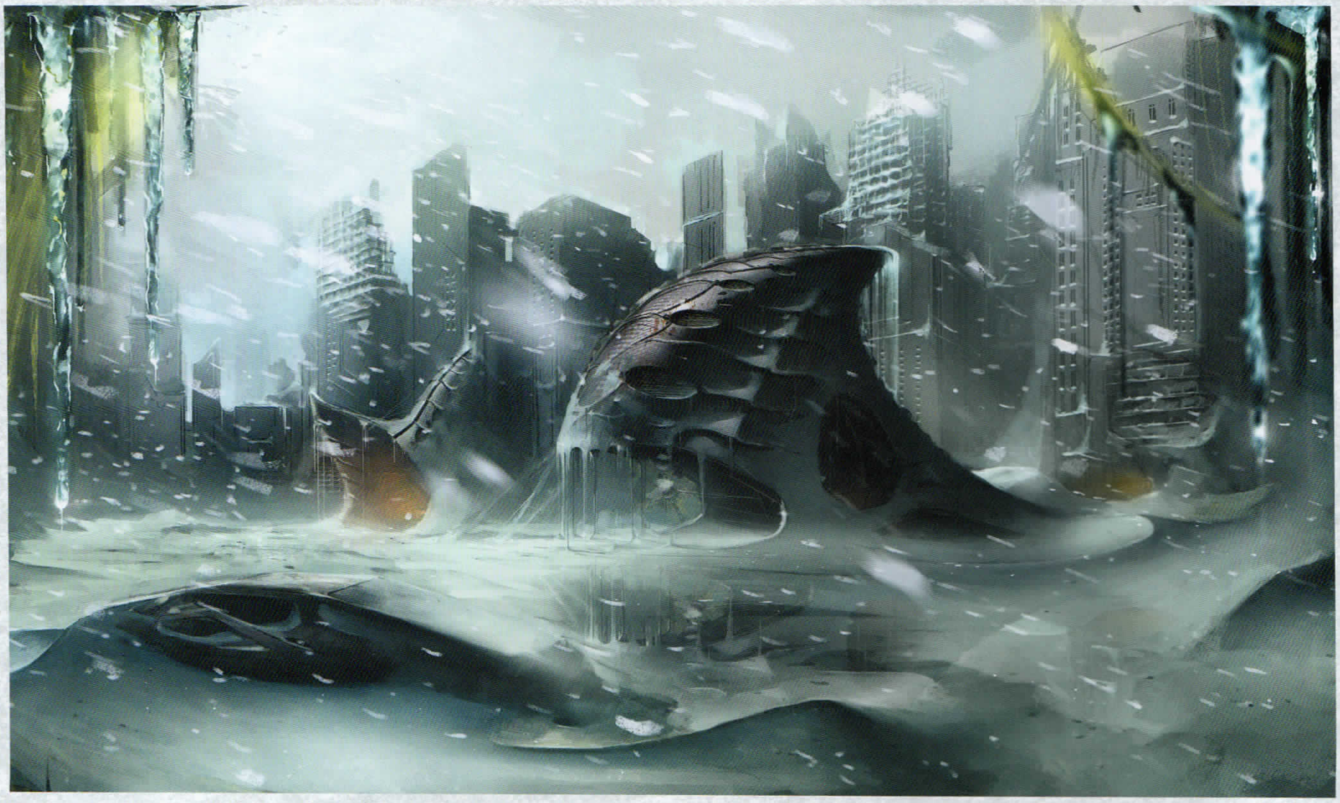
As of D+485, the Admiralty and the High Council have succumbed to repeated demands and passed an exception to our cherished 'Preserved City' policy, permitting the levelling of the centre by orbital bombardment. This is the least precious and most dilapidated city on the planet and thus the loss has been deemed acceptable in return for wiping out the high concentrations of Scourge here.

Currently we have the enemy boxed in to a confined area. In order to destroy the vast majority of this force it has been decided that a low-ionisation tactical nuclear strike will be the best way to proceed, as we do not have enough ships with conventional orbital bombardment capability left in system to supply the concentration of fire needed in so short a time period. Using the available assets would hugely increase the duration of a full conventional bombardment, and the Scourge would inevitably attempt to break out in desperation. Such a large force of mobile armour can no longer be permitted to exist on Eden Prime.

This operation will require the cooperation and ultimately extraction of the friendly (and highly effective) Resistance forces in the city. Since many are operating behind enemy lines, their job will be to disable or destroy all missile halo and anti-orbital assets in the city immediately before extraction, allowing the strike to get through. Timing will be crucial and the withdrawal must be rapid, as the removal of our noose from the enemy's throat for any significant time will give them an opportune window to react prior to their obliteration. Secrecy is of course essential as is the element of surprise - this operation is strictly need to know for the clearance level of this document only.

The Strike is tentatively scheduled for D+525 (awaiting final presidential approval) and preparations for the operation are well underway.

SCOURGE STRUCTURES, NEW ATHENS



CITY OF NEW ATHENS – EDEN PRIME

The City of New Athens remains firmly in Scourge hands. Unfortunately, the loss of much of our ground strength in the desolation of Atlantia has left the UCMA incapable of launching an assault on this final enemy stronghold at this time. However, most of the surrounding settlements have now been captured and all that is required for the assault to begin is fresh troops from the colonies.

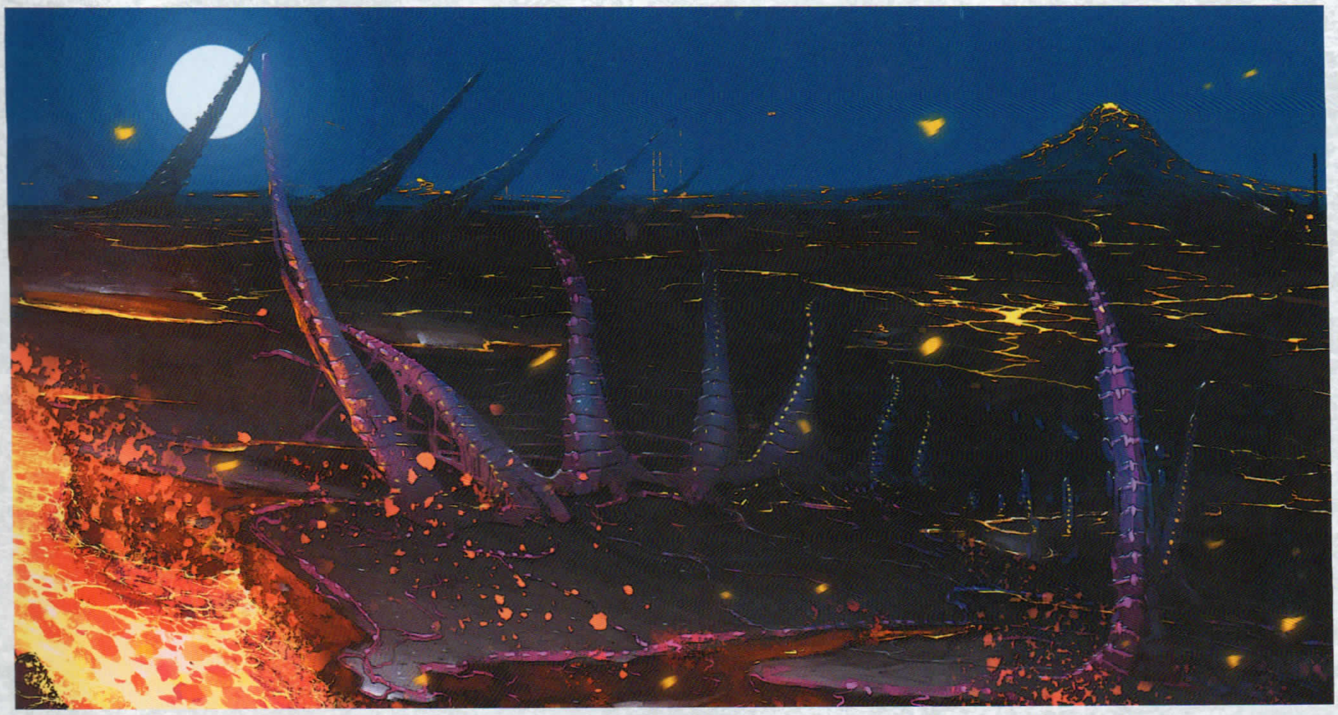
The Scourge are effectively trapped and isolated there at this time, without reinforcements from orbit and nowhere left to retreat to. With their backs to the frozen northern icecap, we can be sure of steep and determined opposition when the operation begins. Preliminary orbital bombardment is sadly unreliable due to the almost permanently adverse weather and the unusually powerful magnetic interference emanating from the pole.

At the time of writing the UCMA is massing for a ground assault, awaiting promised reinforcements from Titania. Due to the aforementioned environmental issues, the assault will need to be ground-based and supported by surface launched dropships.

The frequent interference by Shaltari forces in this sector is also a constant headache for our ground forces. Smaller elements are usually targeted and obliterated by superior alien forces which then vanish before a response can be brought to bear. It has been postulated that Shaltari aircraft can operate in such harsh conditions far more easily than our own, allowing their teleport gates to redirect their forces to places that we simply don't have the capability to follow safely. Their constant predations have undoubtedly delayed the assault here by many months and the capricious aliens are a factor that cannot be ignored.

The final assault on New Athens will undoubtedly be a hard fight in sub-zero temperatures. It is vital that the command structure maintains morale in the build-up, and that they respond to insubordination with harsh discipline. This will be a true test of our resolve and courage and our troops must not falter. Officers will be held responsible in the event of loss of morale or breakdown in command.

REMNANTS OF SCOURGE STRUCTURES, EDGES OF ODIN'S FOUNDRY



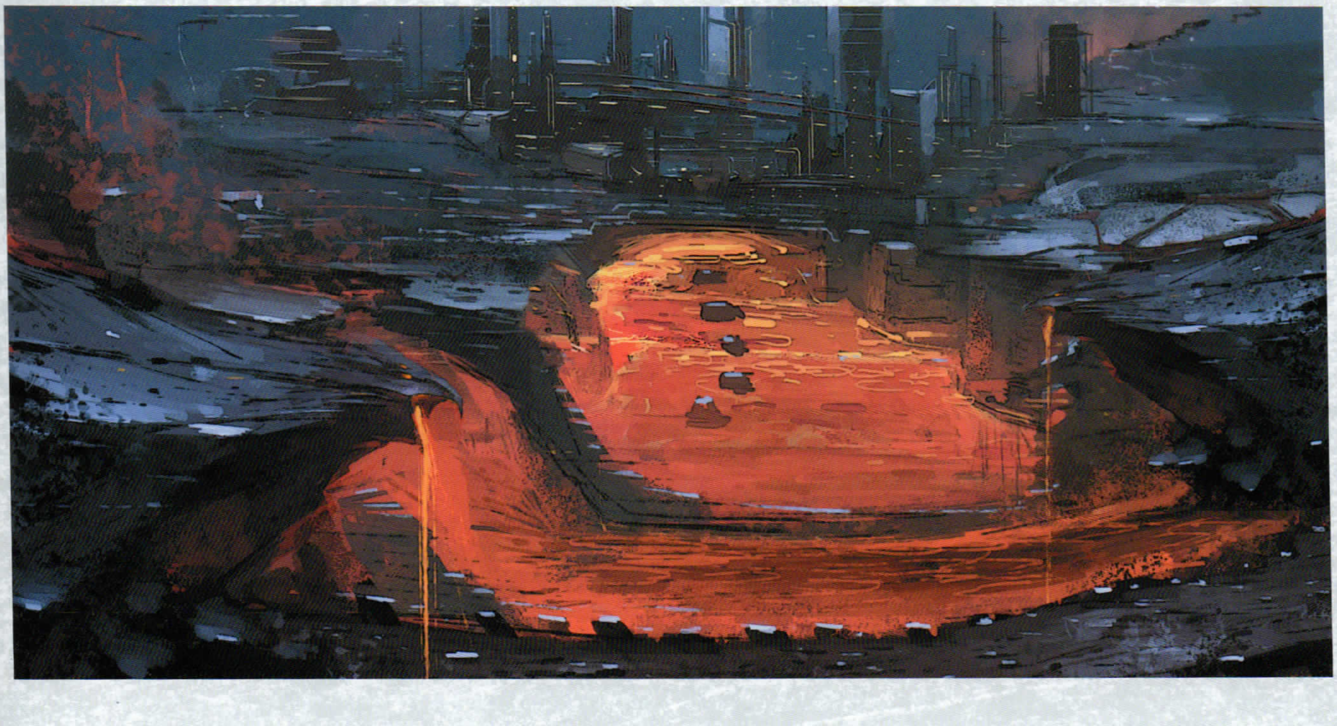
ODIN'S FOUNDRY - EDEN PRIME

Eden Prime's 2000 mile long mantle scar (also known as 'Odin's Foundry') is now largely in the hands of the UCM. Actions against remaining enemy forces can largely be considered a mop-up operation at this point.

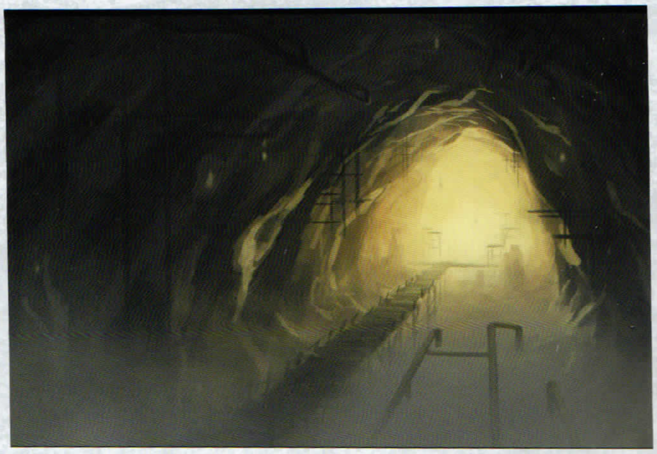
The primary objective for our remaining forces here is to protect, reinforce and bring online our newly captured industrial assets in this sector. These will be crucial, providing the additional high quality minerals and metals sorely needed for the war effort, most notably for shipbuilding. Since the carnage over Olympus Prime, the replacement of lost tonnage has become a matter of urgency for the UCMF and the UCM as a whole.

The major complication in this is the presence of several extreme Feral Resistance groups in the area that oppose our occupation. Despite being of the same race, these degenerates view us as little different from the Scourge who recently held this region in their iron grip.

However, we have diplomacy at our disposal and we must succeed where the Scourge failed by bringing these savages under our control, lest they disrupt the vital flow of materials. Bands that are eager or willing to work with us will be crucial in aiding our efforts to find and, if need be, remove their less civilised kin.



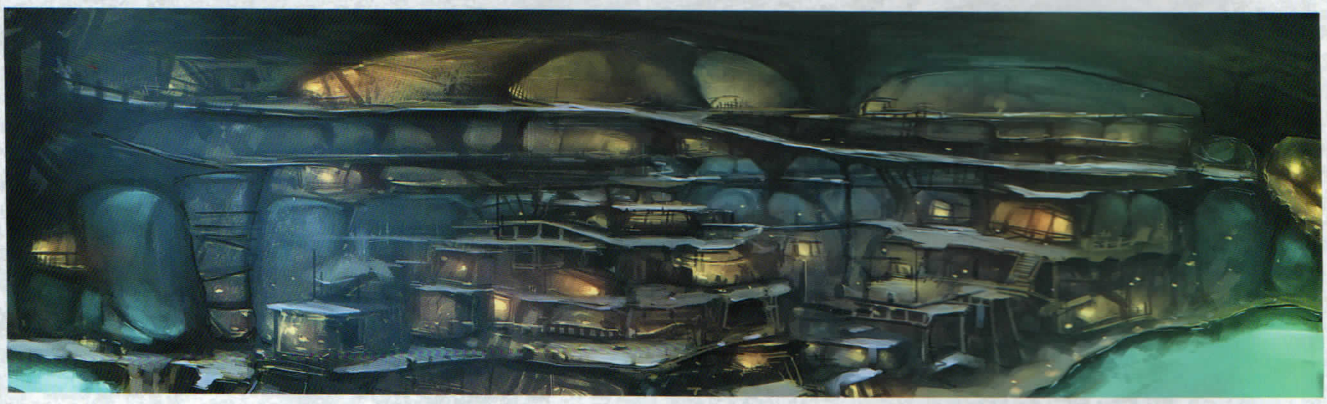
TITANIUM MINE ACCESS VENT, EDEN VII



TITANIUM MINES - EDEN VII

With the capture of the main Titanium mines the combat operations here are being wound down, although hit and run strikes from the Scourge's northern underground strongpoints are becoming increasingly common.

It must be hoped that Admiral Kronstein's plan for saturation nuclear strikes on these sites from orbit prove effective, should they receive approval from the High Council. In the meantime, garrison troops in the northern hemisphere should be on their guard for rapid surprise attacks from the Scourge.



SETTING GAMES IN THE EDEN SYSTEM (PHASE 3) - DESIGNER'S NOTES

The Eden system is currently the closest system to absolute UCM control in the Reconquest; however, the fighting is far from over and recent events present new possibilities for players. In addition to those suggested in ***Reconquest: Phase 1,*** here are some more ideas for gaming in this system:

1) **Games in Atlantia's nuclear wasteland -** The city of Atlantia has just been almost completely annihilated by high-yield nuclear weapons at this point in the narrative. This presents a whole raft of possibilities for rescue and recovery missions, not to mention the awesome scenic possibilities.

3) **Behind enemy lines in Star Casablanca -** Attacks against missile halo ground assets (control stations, power relays, launchers etc.) make for excellent missions. The Aegis Orbital Defence Laser makes an impressive centrepiece for such games. Timed missions against the impending tactical nuclear strike would also work well here. Players could add a points penalty for the Attacker related to how many friendly units are still on the table at the end of the game.

4) **The Battle for New Athens -** This is currently shaping up to be the final full-scale ground battle of the war on Eden Prime. The Scourge are well entrenched here and won't go down without a hard fight! This city is based in the frozen north, making arctic themed tables highly appropriate. A fully winterised Sci-Fi city would make a stunning hobby project.

5) **Odin's Foundry Counter-Insurgency -** The savage Resistance groups based here provide interesting possibilities for themed armies - these guys are as feral as it gets! Since the UCM are now the occupiers of this region, their crazed fury will be directed at them. Don't forget the inspiring scenery building possibilities of a lava filled industrial nightmare!

6) **Karl Foley vs Salakahn -** The fact that the Tyrant of Atlantia slipped through his fingers (coupled with mass genocide of course) will make Karl Foley even keener to seek his reckoning with Salakahn. This ongoing rivalry could provide the base for a narrative campaign centred on these two famous commanders.

ELYSIUM THEATRE - INVASION PHASE 2

ELYSIUM PRIME

AHQ SITUATION REPORT: ELYSIUM SYSTEM, OCT 19TH, 2671AD, D+323

+ + + Classified level 2 - Senate and Ranking UCMA/F Officers Eyes Only + + +

SURFACE OPERATIONS – ELYSIUM PRIME

Fighting in Elysium Prime's capital of Triticum is reaching a decisive stage. They have been denied reinforcements due to developments in other theatres, and the original combat deployment of 5 million troops is slowly beginning to suffer the effects of attrition and battle fatigue. Even so, our landing force remains 72% combat effective and is still deemed sufficient to conquer the rest of the planet in an acceptable timeframe. Further, the Elysium system's secondary planets have been in our hands since Phase 1 and are no longer included in military status reports (for more information, see separate reconquest integration, logistics and restructuring reports).

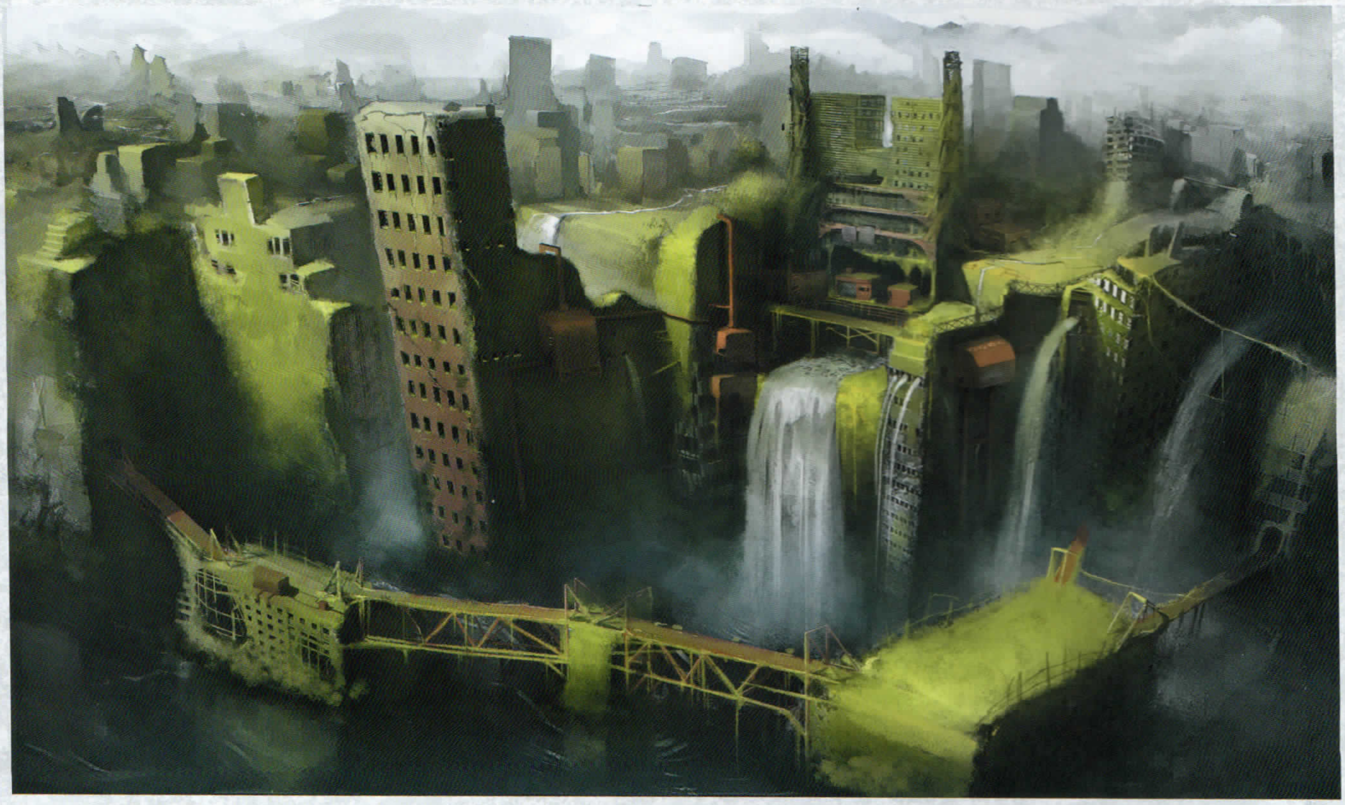
AHQ analysts are increasingly viewing this theatre as an example that will either vindicate or refute our projections and models. Only limited external or unforeseen factors are at work on the ground at this time and it is simply a case of whether enough troops have been committed to complete the task. While a clinical and detached analysis, war on this scale is an industrial, species-level conflict, and the numbers must tell.

Elysium remains a crucial Cradle World due to its vast food production capacity. While additional supplies are always welcome, the value of denying this resource to the enemy far outweighs our gains. This objective was wholly achieved during the early stages of Phase 1 with the destruction of the Scourge fleet in the Elysium system, cutting off the rest of Scourge territory from this bread basket world. This is the main explanation for the lack of haste in completing the Reconquest here as other, more immediate problems exist in other systems. Exemplary generalship and steely resolve will have to take the place of limitless reinforcements to win the day here.

ORBITAL OPERATIONS

Enemy fleet assets in the Elysium system have been entirely neutralised and not a single Scourge ship is reported present. However, attacks from Shaltari ships are a persistent problem and even after almost a year in theatre Battlefleet Elysium has failed to bring the Shaltari to a meaningful void battle.

Tactics are improving however and coupled with the welcome delivery of several hundred fast frigates of mixed classes fresh from Niccolum's shipyards, it has been possible to keep the Shaltari at bay for now. The aliens' focus seems to be causing disruption and slowing our efforts to bring the campaign on the ground to an end. Supply ships are the most common targets and while these attacks result in little direct loss of life, they are certainly hurting our hard pressed troops on the ground.



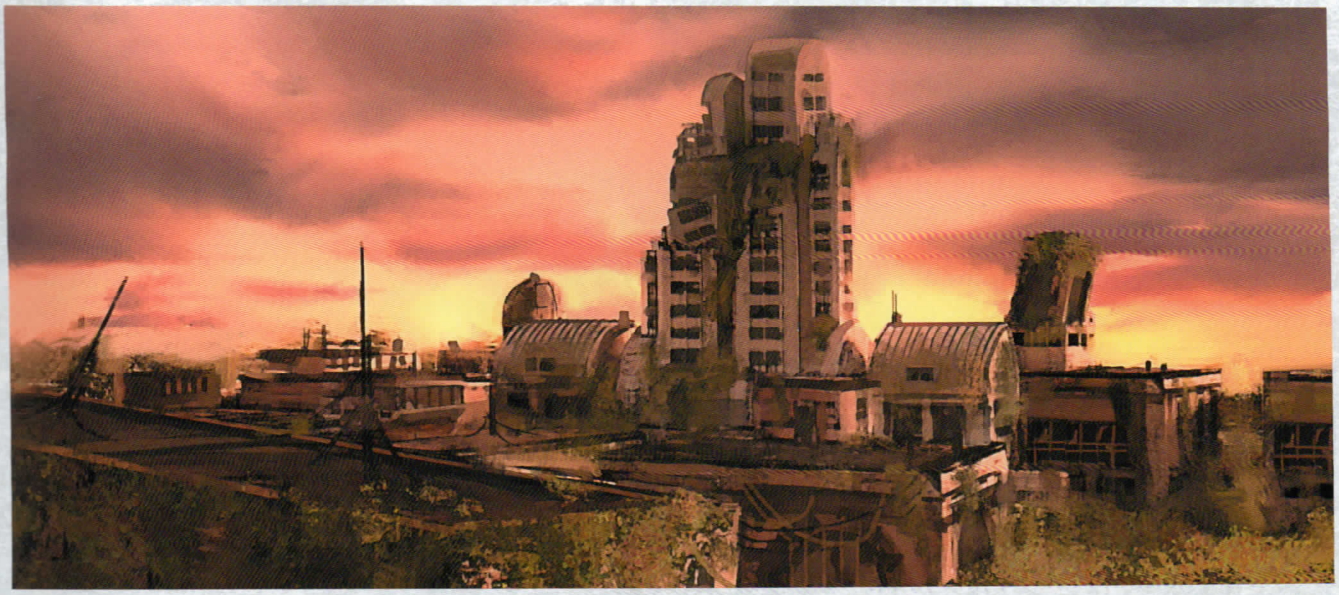
CITY OF TRITICUM - ELYSIUM PRIME

The massive concentrations of Scourge forces in the centre of the capital are under increasing pressure due to our encirclement tactics. UCM troops are now advancing on multiple fronts into the city itself and constricting Scourge held territory still further.

Cut off from supplies and without an escape route, Scourge forces there will be doomed to slow constriction and annihilation. The enemy obviously knows this and until recently has been launching periodic raids from outside the city to attempt to affect a breakout. These raids have ceased in recent weeks however, resulting in a general sense of unease and foreboding among some of our more experienced generals.

Recon patrols are being stepped up in anticipation of a massive enemy offensive to finally break their forces out of the city. Unfortunately, swift and lethal flights of Shaltari Warspears have been downing an alarming number of recon aircraft recently, further adding to the sense of impending carnage without allowing us more specific knowledge on Scourge troop build-ups.

The prevailing attitude of AHQ is to take all necessary precautions against Scourge incursion and to prepare for a major counter-offensive in the coming weeks.



CITY OF GRANUM - ELYSIUM PRIME

Colonial forces have begun preliminary bombardment against Scourge positions in Granum; Elysium Prime's second city, and a focus for strong Scourge opposition. Ground emplacements and orbital assets are being employed in the bombardment, guided and designated by our local Resistance allies.

Unfortunately, their indispensible efforts to call in accurate fire have been disrupted by the crazed warbands of the Feral savage Gunnarr, the infamous Ferryman of Elysium. It seems this true psychopath is hell-bent on butchering all who attempt to assist the UCM. Whatever shred of strategic awareness this man possesses seems to have realized that our capture of the city will put an end to his grizzly playground once and for all.

Our ally's commander, the esteemed Jessie Adams, is assisting us as best she can in efforts to kill this madman, although it seems she has been trying herself for many years without success. A final reckoning between these two most juxtaposed leaders may be coming and AHQ will do all it can to assist.

In the meantime, Jessie's unrivalled knowledge of Granum's hotly contested tunnel system has proved invaluable in gaining solid intel of enemy forces deep inside the city itself; a feat we could only attempt from orbit (a poor substitute for on the ground knowledge) due to heavy Scourge AA presence in the city.

SETTING GAMES IN THE ELYSIUM SYSTEM (PHASE 2) - DESIGNER'S NOTES

UCM activities have stalled somewhat in this theatre at this point in the narrative and are facing a difficult fight in the future without significant reinforcements. Although the strategic aim of this campaign (cutting the rest of Scourge territory off from this massive food supply) has already been achieved, this will be no comfort to the boots on the ground who must now dig deep to achieve final victory! In addition to those suggested in ***Reconquest: Phase 1,*** here are some more ideas for gaming in this system:

1) Enemy counter-offensive in Triticum - The Scourge are clearly planning a massive attack in an attempt to liberate their beleaguered forces pinned down in the capital. This is a good setting for large battles as well as specially designed missions themed around a possible break-out.

2) The assault on Granum begins - This is the last major city on Elysium Prime still in Scourge hands and represents a hard fight for the UCM. This is a good general setting for games using many different scenarios.

3) Gunnarr vs Jessie Adams - The almost lifelong rivalry between these two diverse characters is still ongoing. Jessie Adams will continue to attempt to put Gunnarr down for good, while he will try to slaughter his way through anything that moves. Games centred on these two famous commanders open up many interesting narrative possibilities.

SHANGRI-LA THEATRE - INVASION PHASE 2

SHANGRI-LA

AHQ SITUATION REPORT: SHANGRI-LA SYSTEM, FEB 10TH, 2671AD, D+5

+++ Classified level 2 - Senate and Ranking UCMA/F Officers Eyes Only +++

SURFACE OPERATIONS - SHANGRI-LA

The planet of Shangri-La was always projected to be one of the most difficult objectives for Reconquest forces. The dense vegitation makes rapid advances on the ground almost impossible, while the thousands of small spaceports provide the enemy with countless strongpoints to fortify.

Unlike other Phase 2 operations, our forces have been unable to confine the Scourge ground forces to localised areas. Instead, pockets of enemy units are everywhere, often well behind our lines. Such an outcome was inevitable, and factored into our plans, but this does not make the terrain any less challenging.

Dropship and bulk lander based operations are still the norm even after over 250 days in theatre, as they are the only viable means of movement. Indeed, AHQ have allocated the highest per-capita dropship ratio in the entire Reconquest to this campaign. Despite the challenges, our forces were progressing well and on schedule until D+245, when the situation in the void took an unexpected and inexplicable turn for the worse.

ORBITAL OPERATIONS

The battle for the void in the Shangri-La system was drawing to a close by D+230. Tenacious opposition from the Scourge garrison fleet was intense but ultimately doomed to fail due to our superior numbers and frequent resupply. Control of the void is always a crucial first step in any Reconquest campaign and the Admiralty was unswerving in its support for eradicating the enemy fleet despite the setbacks in the Olympus Theatre.

With the void war all but won, Battlefeet Shangri-La began preparation for a system wide hunter-killer sweep to find and eliminate all remaining enemy ships. Artfully executed Scourge hit and run strikes had become frequent as the confrontation became ever more asymmetric in our favour and the Admiralty had finally lost patience. This sweep would involve almost the entire Battlefleet in order to cast the net as wide as possible and give the enemy no room to escape to the outer marker and jump away.

Once the sweep was well underway on D+245, warning claxons sounded the approach of hundreds of unknown vessels around the system's outer markers. Battlefleet Slangri-La was at this point spread thinly throughout the system and poorly positioned to respond. Wiping out our remaining picket ships while punching through to Shangri-La itself, the largest single PHR fleet formation yet thrown against us was revealed. Their strike carriers immediately began landing ops on dozens of obscure locations simultaneously, overwhelming UCM and Scourge forces on the surface alike.

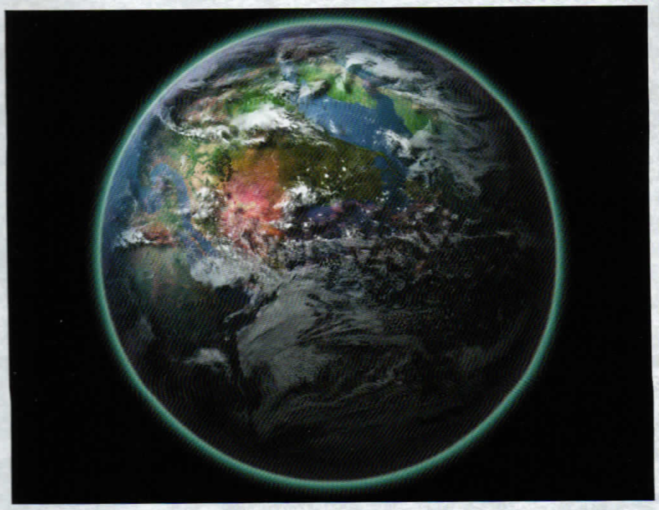
Ten days after their assault began, Battlefleet Shangri-La has as yet been unable to bring the PHR fleet to battle. It took several days to re-form into a viable large scale formation capable of taking on the massive PHR fleet without being picked off, and since then the enemy have been evading us masterfully. Strategists are increasingly of the opinion that they are not in system to destroy us directly, but rather for some other purpose. They could have easily exploited our wide positioning to destroy our entire fleet piecemeal, but seemed to choose not to.

The situation around the PHR dropsites on the ground is an entirely different story. Our forces there have been destroyed utterly and without mercy, as have those of the Scourge. Due to the presence of the PHR fleet we have been unable to respond to these concentrations with orbital bombardment or drops and it will instead be up to the UCMA and ground launched dropships to enact vengeance for these attacks.

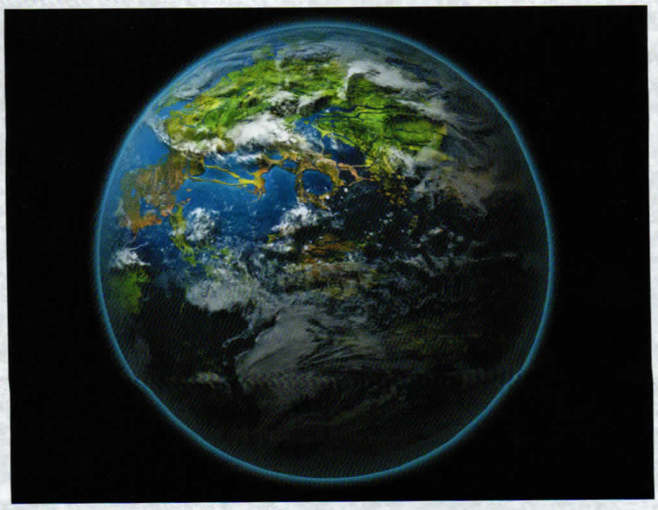
There is evidence that the PHR are beginning to withdraw back to orbit at several locations, increasing pressure on us to respond and perhaps learn some truth as to the Republic's mission here before it is too late.

A side effect of this attack is that Scourge raiding battlegroups are still extant in the system, as our sweep had to be called off in order to respond. They will undoubtedly make us pay for this disproportionately and supply convoys and unarmed vessels should be on constant alert for surprise attacks.

HELEN



PERSEPHONE



SURFACE OPERATIONS - SECONDARY PLANETS

The system's two other habitable planets, Helen and Persephone, began as low priority targets due to their hostile flora and fauna and extensive Scourge anti-orbital setups. It was decided in Phase 1 that defeating these with conventional assault would be costly and would offer uncertain returns.

Neither planet was particularly productive in the pre-war years due to the hostile wildlife and it was unclear whether this had changed under Scourge occupation. Instead, it was decided that more on the ground intel was required and series of low-key MF-R insertions were approved in the early stages of the campaign.

These recon sorties have recently provided us with some invaluable intel and have forced us to reappraise and upgrade the value of both planets as strategic targets for Phase 2. Unfortunately, the unconscionably high fatality rate (even among the most elite MF-R teams) confirms that the wildlife is just as lethal as ever. Indeed, almost half of all un-armoured personnel dropped were poisoned, decapitated, crushed, eaten or otherwise maimed by these planet's deadly bioforms before they even observed a single Scourge.

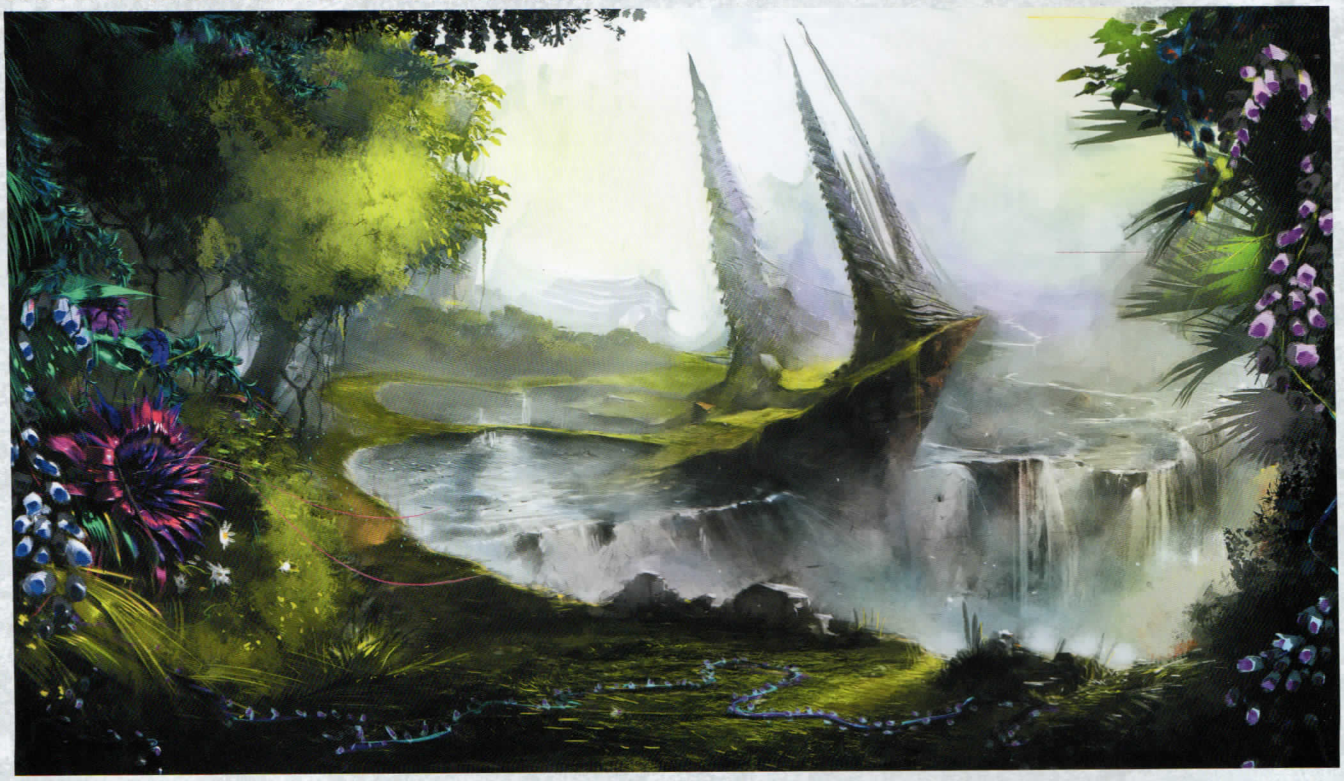
The teams that did make it to their observer positions witnessed some shocking additions by the enemy. It seems that the Scourge are using Helen and Persephone as locations for massive growth hives for both Human and alien Scourge hosts. UCM astrobiologists theorise that the high oxygen content in the atmosphere coupled with other environmental factors somehow increase the success rate of Scourge rapid vat-based host growth from less than 10% to over 40%.

In addition, the hives were also being used as R&D facilities for converting some of the most lethal wildlife into new Scourge host types. Clearly, such abominable labs cannot be allowed to exist and as soon as these reports were in, AHQ began drawing plans to destroy these facilities.

With the fluid and evolving situation in the void, small scale, focused ground insertions have been chosen as the method to destroy these key locations as opposed to orbital bombardment, which has been deemed too risky at this time.

ACTIVE SURFACE BATTLEFRONTS

SOUTHERN OVERLOOK WITH SCOURGE EMPLACEMENT



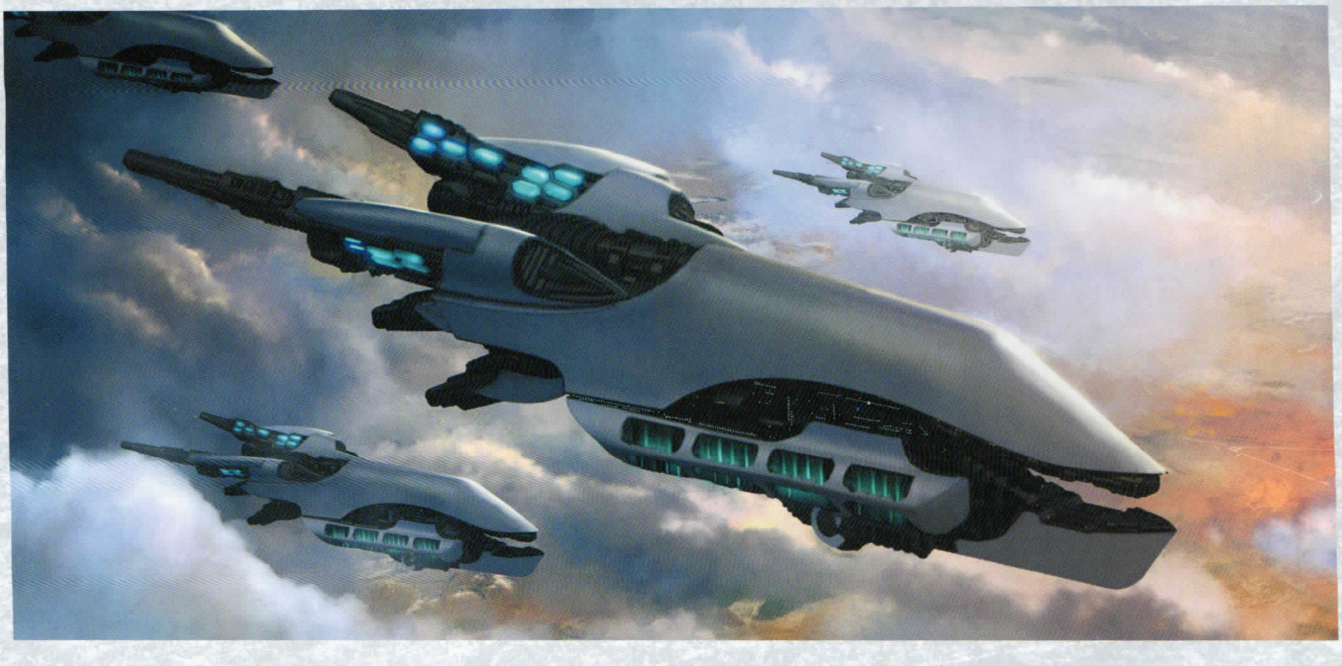
SPACEPORT COMPLEXES AND PHR DROPSITES - SHANGRI-LA

We are currently focusing on countering the newly arrived PHR forces in and around their dropsites. Priority one is to neutralise the invaders, priority two is to ascertain the purpose of their incursions. Our top analysts are still in the dark as to the Republic's purposes in the war and this may be the first major opportunity to find out more, given the scale and duration of their campaign.

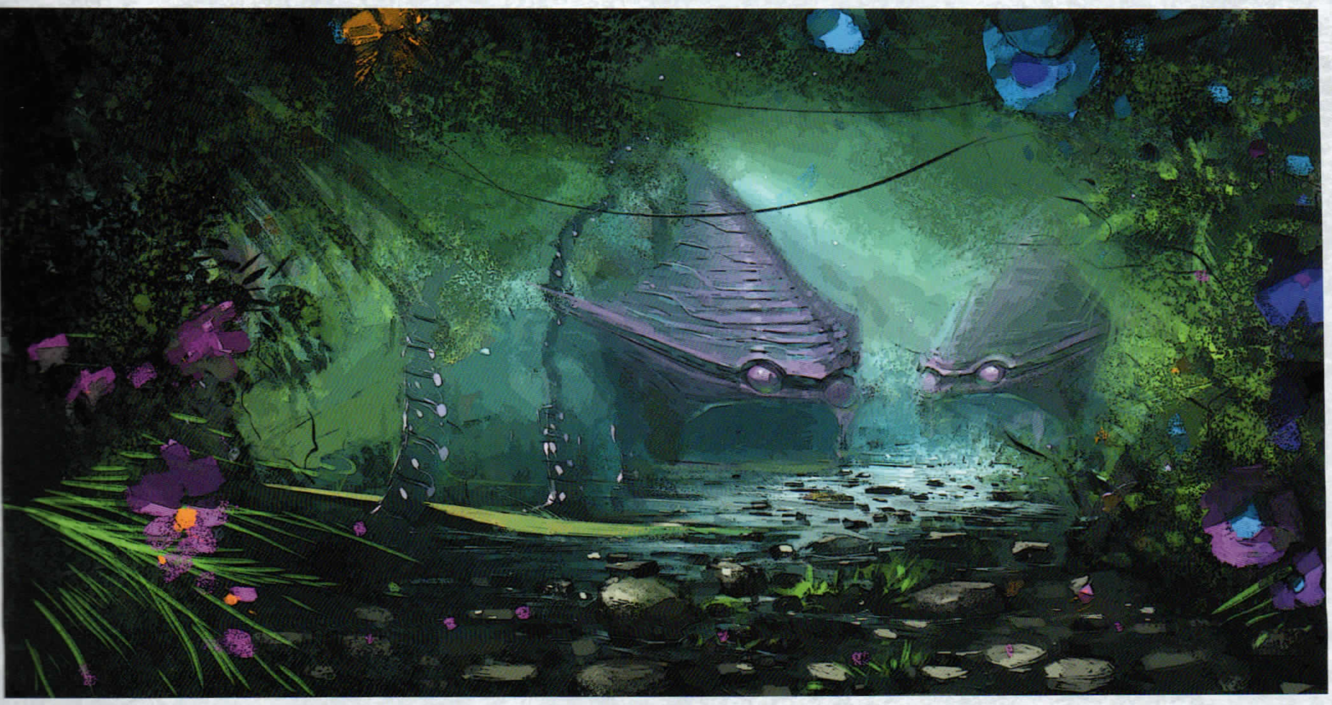
Previous attacks by PHR forces have generally been astonishingly rapid and localised, giving us little chance to respond.

This operation is far larger than anything that has come before and may just give us the time to gain some desperately needed intelligence. Efforts against the huge number of extant Scourge enclaves and redoubts on the planet are still of course ongoing and will continue despite the PHR presence.

We simply cannot afford to give the vile aliens time to regroup in the face of our unforeseen setback and we must maintain the pressure. The UCM still has the numerically superior force to both the Scourge and PHR combined and we should not be cowed into reactive actions only. Maintaining pro-active and offensive operations against the enemy is paramount to completing Phase 2 of the invasion here.



BREEDING HIVE, QUADRANT 2432, PERSEPHONE



EXPERIMENTAL HIVE FACILITIES
- HELEN AND PERSEPHONE

Full scale assault against these affronts to nature have been deemed too costly and initially planners turned to surgical insertion of elite teams to destroy the facilities from within. However, the experiences and unacceptable non-combat fatalities incurred by the recon teams forced a re-think. Instead of using un-armoured MF-R operatives, AHQ have turned to the new Heavy Hazard suit teams as the core of the infantry assault. Heavily armoured and completely enclosed, they would at least be proof against some of Helen and Persephone's poisonous animals, plants and fungi.

These troops will need armoured vehicle support for the insertion, as stealth is hardly the preserve of hulking armoured suits. As such, the scale of the planned operations has increased beyond the clandestine. Focused, surgical and rapid insertion by dropship is planned to commence as soon as the PHR fleet presence is dealt with and some friendly ships can safely be assigned to assist in the operations.

The very best pilots will be required and the approach will need to be long due to fearsome Scourge anti-orbital protection around the facilities. These missions have been declared 'volunteer only' and casualties are projected to be high.

SETTING GAMES IN THE SHANGRI-LA SYSTEM (PHASE 2) - DESIGNER'S NOTES

Ground combat in the whole system is still very much in flux, especially with the arrival of the PHR. In addition to those suggested in ***Reconquest: Phase 1***, below are some more ideas for gaming in this system. Don't forget - every planet in this theatre opens up awesome jungle style modelling opportunities. Also, be sure to check out some of the new environmental rules later in this book - many of them are perfect for games set here!

1) The PHR attack! - This theatre has seen some of the heaviest PHR involvement in the entire Reconquest so far. They have a number of obscure objectives but at this point in the narrative they are most concerned with taking and holding their beachheads and searching for whatever they came for. The UCM and Scourge are sure to react to their incursions of course.

2) Intel gathering against the PHR - With this many Republic forces in theatre, it will be harder and harder for them to keep their activities secret. Attempts by all four other races to gather intel against them are likely to be intense and opens up many gaming possibilities.

3) Spaceport hopping continues - Despite the setbacks, the UCM still need to capture many of Shangri-La's spaceports.

4) Attacks on the Hives on Helen and Persephone - These attacks will be focused and fast but require full armoured support, making them ideal for games of DZC. These locations are perfect for some of the new environmental rules, not to mention the mega-fauna and flora outside the hives and the terrifying bio-mechanical nightmares in their interiors...

OLYMPUS THEATRE - PREPARATORY PHASE

OLYMPUS PRIME

ADMIRALTY SITUATION REPORT: OLYMPUS SYSTEM, OCT 19TH, 2671AD, D-UNSPECIFIED

+++ Classified level 3 - Senate and Admiralty L3+ Staff Eyes Only +++

ORBITAL OPERATIONS

Orbital operations against the Scourge in this theatre are unfortunately still ongoing many months into the campaign. The voidspace over Olympus prime has since become the largest graveyard of military starships ever witnessed by mankind. Over a thousand vessels of frigate tonnage or above have met their demise here with truly staggering losses on both sides.

The initial engagement saw the majority of the devastation and lasted a full nine days - a record for a single fleet action. As Battlefleet Olympus was sent priority reinforcements from other theatres, the Scourge were equally willing to throw ships into the meat grinder. For some reason, they chose this battle to make a stand against us, representing the first major test for our fleet. Ultimately, we emerged victorious but badly mauled.

The Admiralty had always expected a major and decisive fleet engagement to take place in the first year of the campaign however, and such losses were deemed inevitable. Tales of daring actions and murderous struggles for the void are legion, but full details are reserved for the Admiralty's main report and are beyond the scope of this document to convey.

Some have denounced this battle as a pyrrhic victory and a cruel waste of ships, others hail it as the first full scale triumph against the Scourge on more or less equal terms. Other void battles in other theatres have been mostly one-sided affairs, with the enemy eventually bowing to inevitable defeat at the hands of our greater numbers. Unfortunately, after the First Battle of Olympus, we can no longer count on certain numerical superiority in the future, such were our losses. Naval Theory is confident that the enemy will also be feeling their casualties just as keenly after such a titanic engagement.

Besides the loss of ships, the first major consequence of the battle was the rendering of Olympus Prime's low orbit into hazardous space. The sheer quantity of debris and wrecked ships now circling the planet make the use of small, lightly armoured voidcraft extremely unsafe. Unfortunately, this includes the UCMA's bulk landers and makes a mass landing of ground forces impossible at this time.

Since many of the derelicts were wrecked at combat speed (gravity nulled and well below unpowered orbital velocity), it is projected that most debris will safely burn up in the coming days and Olympus Prime's low orbit will likely be declared safe in less than two months, when landing ops can finally begin.

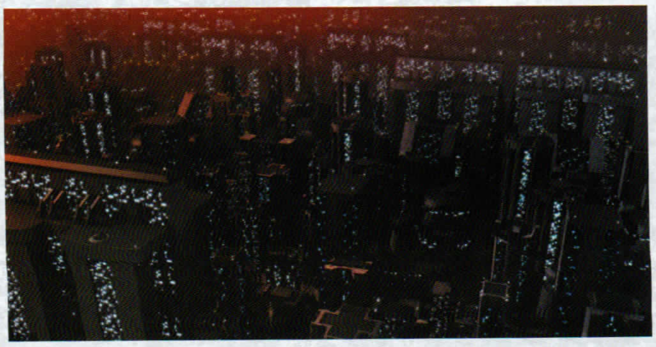
In the meantime, Scourge raiding parties remain a constant threat and waves of enemy reinforcements can and do arrive at any time. It appears that the Scourge are continuing to do all they can to prevent D-day on Olympus, although they have clearly switched tactics from full scale battle to naval skirmish and hit and run attacks. Even so, Battlefleet Olympus is still indisputably the largest of our fleets and is well prepared to face whatever the aliens have to throw at us.

SURFACE OPERATIONS – OLYMPUS PRIME

We have begun landing small expeditionary forces by Strike Carriers and Lysanders as a preparatory phase of operations before the main landing assault begins. These vessels are armoured well enough to punch through the debris field acceptably and are currently the only option for landing troops, although they cannot carry the numbers needed for a true invasion. Instead, their objectives are to destroy ground based defence batteries and orbital defence grid control stations in focused strikes, withdrawing once successful, as we cannot maintain a beachhead. As the element of surprise is long since lost to us in this theatre, preparations ahead of the invasion must be thorough and meticulous as we can no longer hope for an uncoordinated response from the enemy. Protracted orbital bombardment is still not a viable option due to all the interference from the debris field. Additionally, the fact that parts of Olympus Prime's potent orbital defence grid are still operational and in enemy hands makes holding station in low orbit hazardous in the extreme.

In addition, an elite recon force has been dispatched to the capital city of Asphodel to observe and, if necessary, intervene in the ongoing PHR assault against Scourge forces there. We have been aware of this incursion since the early days of the campaign and Naval Theory is keen to gain some hard intel on the ground. It seems that the local Resistance are almost exclusively working with the Republic, so we cannot count on their support or local knowledge.

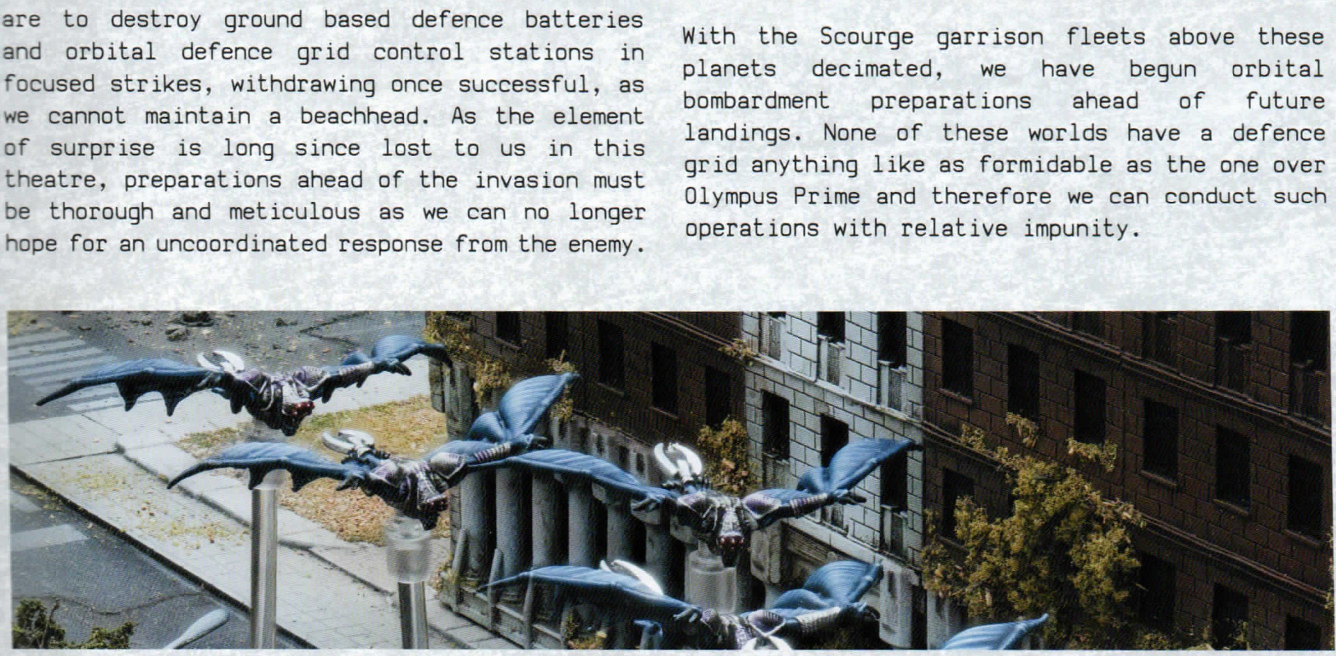
What is certain is that with our naval blockade firmly in place, the PHR ground forces are now trapped in the city with no hope of extraction or reinforcements. If there was ever an opportunity to discover the truth of the post-human's enigmatic part in the war, this may be it.



SURFACE OPERATIONS – SECONDARY PLANETS

The Olympus system contains three other planets with viable objectives on the surface, Olympus II, V and IX. These were all reclassified as Phase-2 objectives early in the campaign due to the difficulties faced in initiating D-Day on Olympus Prime.

With the Scourge garrison fleets above these planets decimated, we have begun orbital bombardment preparations ahead of future landings. None of these worlds have a defence grid anything like as formidable as the one over Olympus Prime and therefore we can conduct such operations with relative impunity.



PREPARATORY PHASE LANDING OPERATIONS - OLYMPUS PRIME

Over thirty small, independent landing ops are currently in progress across the surface of Olympus Prime to help prepare the ground for the full scale invasion. They are charged with a variety of objectives including destroying defence batteries, control stations and power sources, in addition to disrupting enemy supply columns and conducting reconnaissance.

These landings are usually in urban or industrial zones and cannot be sustained for more than a few days at a time as any coordinated enemy response is lethal and overwhelming. These operations are projected to continue for at least the next 60 days as the fleet waits for the orbiting debris field to clear.

INTELLIGENCE GATHERING - ASPHODEL CITY, OLYMPUS PRIME

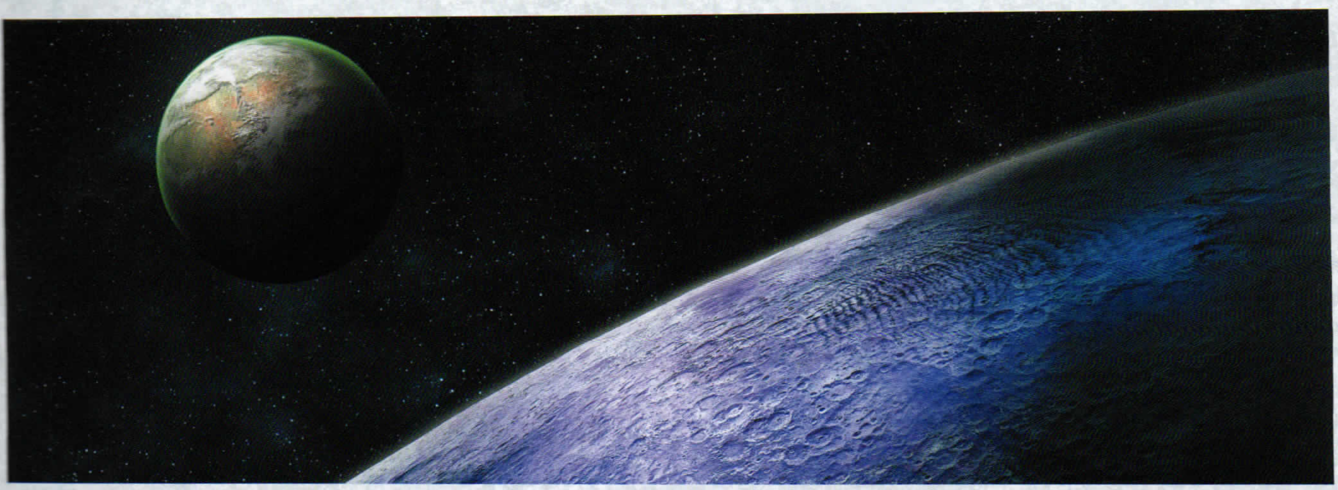
A Marine Force Recon detachment with limited light vehicle support is currently en-route to Asphodel to ascertain the mysterious purpose of the PHR incursion here. They have orders not to engage unless fired upon and must rely on stealth and careful movements to avoid detection.

There are currently six combat hotspots spread seemingly at random throughout the city, in what would generally be designated as low-priority zones in a UCM invasion. The detachment will be split into six teams on arrival to reconnoitre each separately as numbers will be of little help if detected. Extraction of the MF-R teams will be by Raven A/S stealth modified dropships at obscure outskirt locations on Nov. 5th, enemy presence permitting.

ESCC FLEET YARDS - OLYMPUS PRIME ORBITALS AND DEFENCE GRID

The landing of ground troops inside the cavernous interiors of Olympus Prime's vast orbital instillations is still ongoing, but progressing well. Such assaults on orbitals are never easy and losses have been proportionately higher than most ground drops. Angles of approach and strategy have necessarily been slow and methodical, as only the outskirts of enemy held orbital reefs can be assailed without our assets being obliterated by overlapping fire arcs.

It is estimated that 35% of the orbitals are now under Colonial control with a further 25% necessarily destroyed or disabled. Capture or deactivation of the remaining 40% is a priority one objective. The importance of this cannot be overstated; such is the potency of Olympus Prime's defence grid that if even 10% remains in enemy hands, landing force casualties during a full scale invasion will be too high for AHQ to accept.



ORBITAL DEFENCE GRID CONTROL - STYX MOON LANDING OPERATIONS

The assault against the underground defence grid control station of Styx (Olympus Prime's lone moon) is in its final stages. This enormous facility is cut over half a mile deep into lunar rock and has presented a challenging zero atmosphere, low grav combat environment. It has cost considerable time and lives to fight our way through to the main chambers and defence has been ferocious.

Deployment of heavy armour to the very core of the station is now underway; enemy resistance remains fierce and of course no fire support can be brought to bear from orbit due to the depth.

Victory is anticipated in a minimum of two weeks' time and this projection does not cover any unknown means the Scourge may have of bringing reinforcements to the battle. AHQ is poised to react if necessary, as the timing of this operation is vital since the parts of the grid that can be shut down with its capture will enable the next major phase of landings on the orbitals themselves.

SETTING GAMES IN THE OLYMPUS SYSTEM (PREPARATORY PHASE) - DESIGNER'S NOTES

Most UCM troops are still stuck in space and unable to launch a full invasion; however, a large number of smaller operations are underway which all make for great settings for DZC games. In addition to those suggested in ***Reconquest: Phase 1,*** here are some more ideas for gaming in this system:

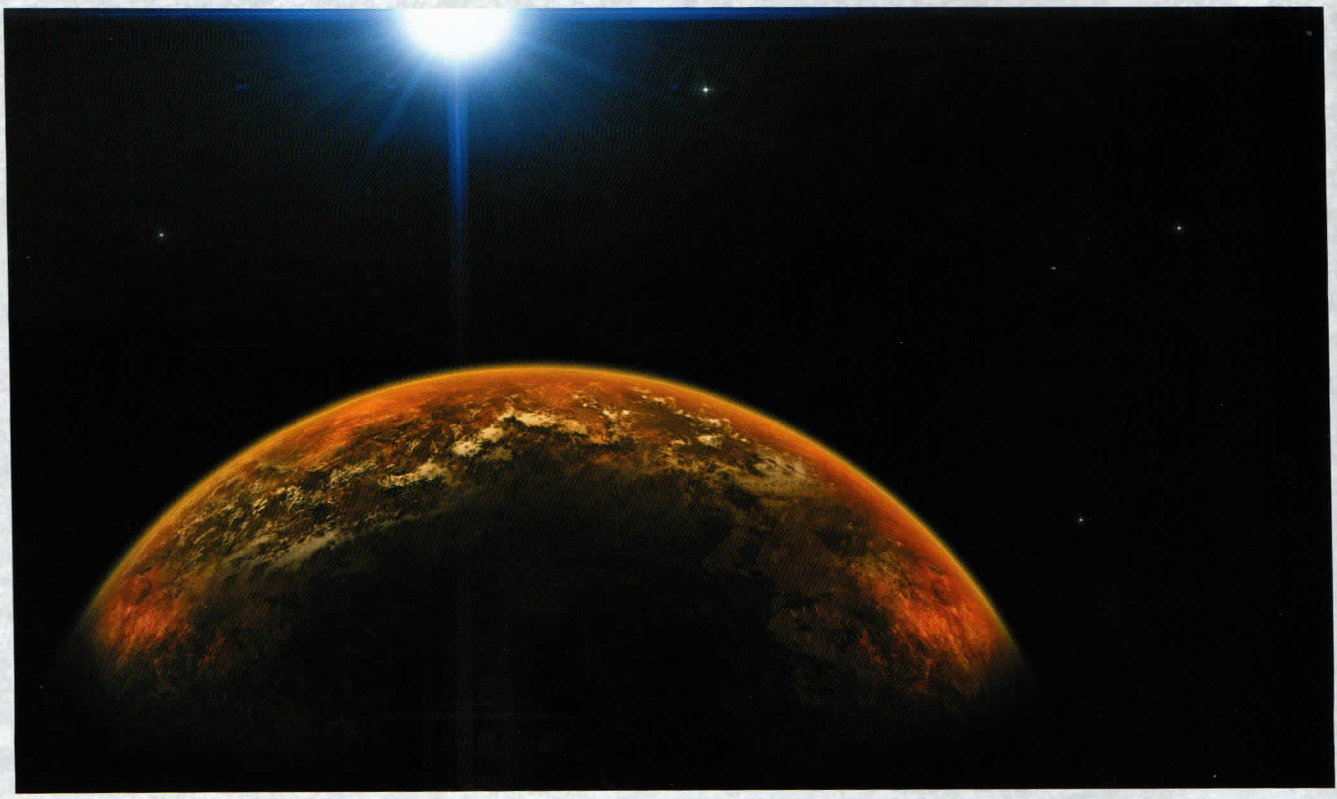
1) Preparatory Landings - Unlike most other theatres, the element of surprise is entirely lost here. As such, the UCM will need to prepare the ground for their invasion carefully by attempting to take out ground defences and control stations. Some custom made scenery would be highly characterful - think of giant anti-orbital guns several feet long, the kind of epic scenery 10mm scale wargaming was made for!

2) Intel gathering in Asphodel city - This presents another opportunity for the UCM to learn more of the PHR's purposes, but since it's well behind enemy lines in a city crawling with Scourge, it will need to be covert. Inventing some house rules would be a good start here and this setting is ideal for smaller games.

3) The battle for Styx Moon - This provides an interesting setting for underground combat in a lunar, low-grav setting, making it ideal for using some of the new environmental rules. It also opens up some interesting ideas for scenery building as these underground spaces are vast – easily large enough to fly dropships into!

AARU THEATRE – RECON REPORTS

AARU



UCMA EXPEDITIONARY FORCE REPORT: AARU, OCT 2ND, 2671AD

+++ Classified level 4 – Senate, Admiralty and AHQ Officers Eyes Only +++

After over eight months of operations in the bowels of this unique planet, our sponsored insurgency against the Scourge is progressing well. Numbers of surviving Resistance groups are highly satisfactory and more are joining the cause every week. Due to the subterranean biosphere environment, it has been possible for millions of free humans to live quietly and largely unmolested by the Scourge during the long years of occupation. An unusual complication of this kind of existence is the people's extreme aversion to sunlight, as most of them have rarely witnessed it. Instead, they live their lives by the dim light of the Aaruvian fauna's bioluminescence.

It is now well understood that the Scourge do not like to operate far from their larger constructs when natural barriers (such as rock) obscure them to whatever passes for communication between the Scourge. Reports of cells fleeing from them and finding safety with pursuit broken in deeper regions are commonplace.

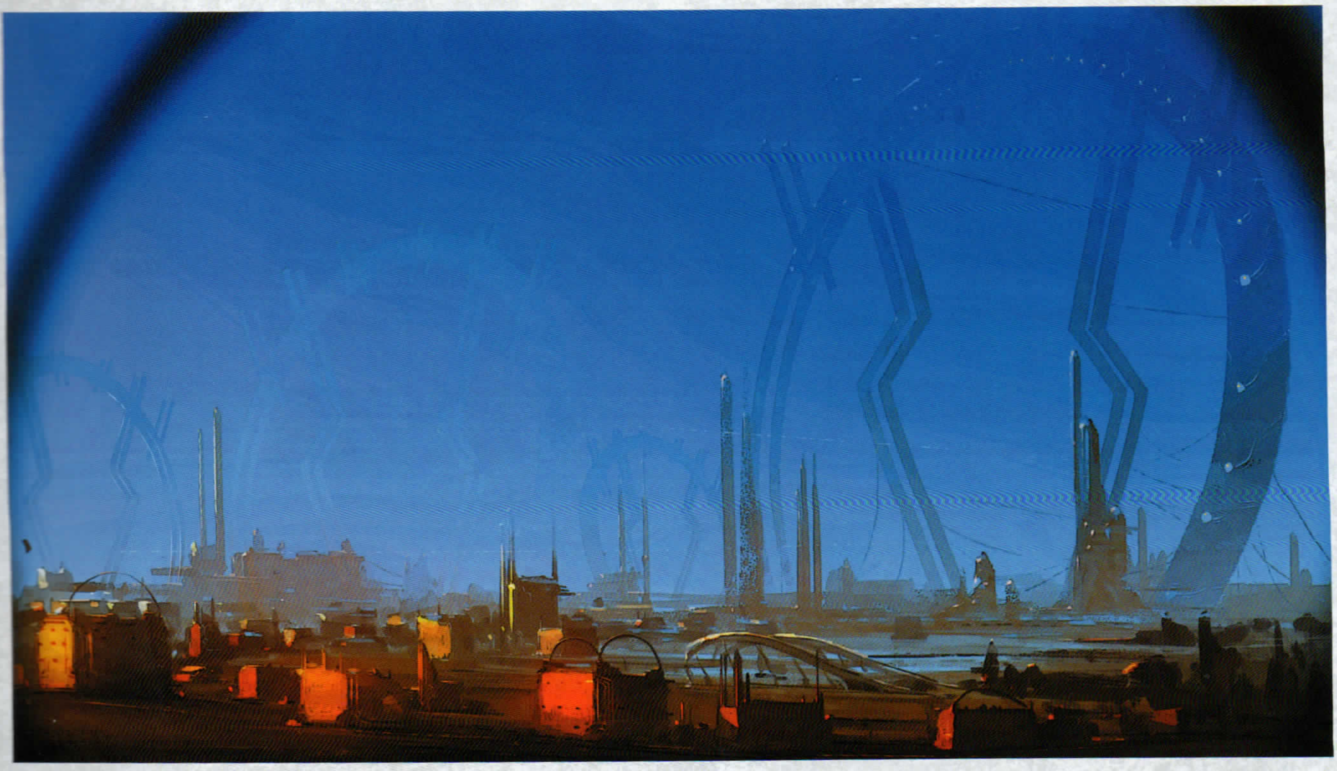
Another contributing factor in our continuing success is the actions of the Shaltari, who are attacking the Scourge mercilessly in multiple sectors. Such engagements are large and we cannot hope to get involved directly with our currently lamentable lack of armour or direct support capability. Instead, we are focused on improving the coordination of desperate Resistance groups and at least we are very well provisioned with high tech comms gear. With this increased cooperation, we have begun attacking enemy supply routes, materiel stores and ammunition dumps, inflicting massive damage with comparatively few losses.

We have yet to ascertain any special military or historical significance for Aaru other than its obviously unique geography and biology, beyond that of its high mineral content (shared with all of the Cradle Worlds). The Shaltari obviously value it highly; however, the Scourge seem to have been siphoning some troops and ships away from Aaru to other theatres in recent months, perhaps due to UCM activities elsewhere. Despite this, current projects suggest that the Shaltari will do little more than frustrate and hamper Scourge operations, as they simply do not have the numbers to fully displace them.

We understand that the apparent military value of this planet is limited in the eyes of the High Council, but we (that is to say myself and the other expedition officers) humbly request, once again, greater materiel support. We are inflicting massively disproportionate damage to the Scourge here, more perhaps than in any other theatre of the Reconquest. That we are achieving this attrition rate with almost no armoured support and very few supplies is a testament to the courage of my men and that of our stalwart Resistance allies.

We beseech you to give this theatre the support it needs, and to send us greater logistical and armoured support as soon as is humanly possible. I find it hard to believe that the Scourge will tolerate our activities much longer, and I fear that the tide may turn very soon without more men. Capture of this Cradle World will be far more difficult for mankind in the future if we lose our key beachheads and the backing of local allies.

Yours, **General J. Church, Officer Commanding, Aaru Expeditionary Force.**



ARMY INTELLIGENCE MEETING REPORT EXTRACT: FERRUM, OCT 12TH, 2671AD

+ + + Classified level 5 – High Council and Senior AHQ/Admiralty Staff Eyes Only + + +

On the Subject of the Aaru campaign,

The High Council, AHQ and the Admiralty are unanimously delighted with the progress that has been possible on Aaru. Gen. Church is clearly doing an excellent job and should be fast tracked for promotion to Field Marshal in future.

Unfortunately, the difficulties of landing meaningful quantities of armoured units into such topography with zero possibility of preliminary bombardment are hard to overestimate. All serious enemy assets are placed well below the surface and will prove deeply challenging to displace since the human forces here during the original Scourge invasion managed to hold out far longer than on any other Cradle World before succumbing, and resistance numbers in the theatre are unusually high, these advantages must be maximised. Unless the General furnishes us with a more pressing reason to allocate recourses disproportionate to this theatre's importance we recommend the continuation of the asymmetric warfare and sponsored insurgency policy until the latter stages of the Reconquest.

AHQ SITUATION REPORT ADDENDUM: AARU, OCT 19TH, 2671AD, D-UNSPECIFIED

+++ Classified level 4 - Senate Admiralty and AHQ Officers Eyes Only +++

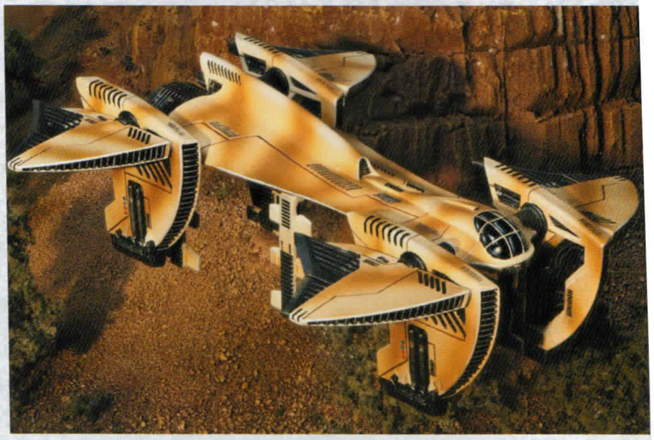
The attached document(s) serve the purpose of illustrating the state of the war in the Aaru theatre and we feel that little more needs to be added within the scope of this report. Active combat operations are detailed in brief below.

ACTIVE SUB-SURFACE BATTLEFRONTS

GUERRILLA WARFARE - ALL HABITABLE ZONES, PREDOMINANTLY SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Raids against soft targets and crucial enemy infrastructure are still ongoing. Forces in such attacks are typically comprised almost exclusively of Resistance forces with minimal armoured support and limited Colonial presence in a support capacity.

The aim of this insurgency campaign is primarily to prepare the ground ahead of a full scale invasion. This will be achieved by slowly weakening the enemy's infrastructure and capacity to react cohesively to threats by targeting communications and logistics.



Larger expeditionary forces will then be dispatched to destroy harder targets, such as the sunken surface defence batteries and subterranean power nodes. However these operations are projected to be many months - if not years - away due to Aaru's second-tier strategic significance in the wider conflict.

The second purpose of the insurgency is to maintain the pressure on the enemy to keep as many hostile troops on Aaru as possible. The constant harassment from Resistance groups is projected to hold a significant quantity of Scourge fighting units in place, greatly aiding our more pressing campaigns in other theatres. This may seem callous but AHQ intelligence believes such considerations will be vital for eventual victory.

SETTING GAMES ON AARU - DESIGNER'S NOTES

Aaru has changed the least of all the Cradle Worlds in the last 250 days of the narrative. The UCM still has the same aims and is still working with similar (inadequate) resources. As suggested in ***Reconquest: Phase 1***, this planet offers some unique modelling opportunities for some truly inventive tables, such as a barren desert above and a verdant subterranean world beneath.

ASGARD THEATRE – THE UNSEEN WAR

ASGARD PRIME

NAVAL INTELLIGENCE THEORIES DEPT. REPORT:

NICCOLUM, OCT 19TH, 2671AD

+ + + Classified level 6 - High Council, Supreme Admiral, Naval Theory and MF-B authorised personnel Eyes Only + + +

As you are no doubt aware, the expeditionary force we sent to Asgard were betrayed by their erstwhile allies in the Resistance during the early stages of their mission, almost certainly due to the machinations of the PHR. All nodes on Asgard ceased to function almost as soon as this took place and only a single UCM vessel, the heavily damaged Lysander class lighter *Leprechaun* was able to escape to the outer marker and jump back to the Colonies to bring us a report.

Since that time, no nodes have been reactivated in the system, making a rescue mission or deployment of reinforcements impossible for the moment. However, a lone ship of antique design was detected just over a month ago slowly drifting into Niccolum voidspace.

Scans revealed a pre-war beacon identifying the vessel as the *Proud Servant*, a private foldspace yacht once registered to the Asgard system. A boarding party found only a single, long dead man at the helm who had clearly succumbed to blood loss from a slash wound most likely from a fragment of shrapnel dislodged by shipfire. He was identified as Corporal Ryoto Aramaki of the Army Air and Space Corps, formerly a Condor dropship pilot. The only thing he carried with him besides his sidearm was a hastily recorded audio log, the transcript of which I enclose below:

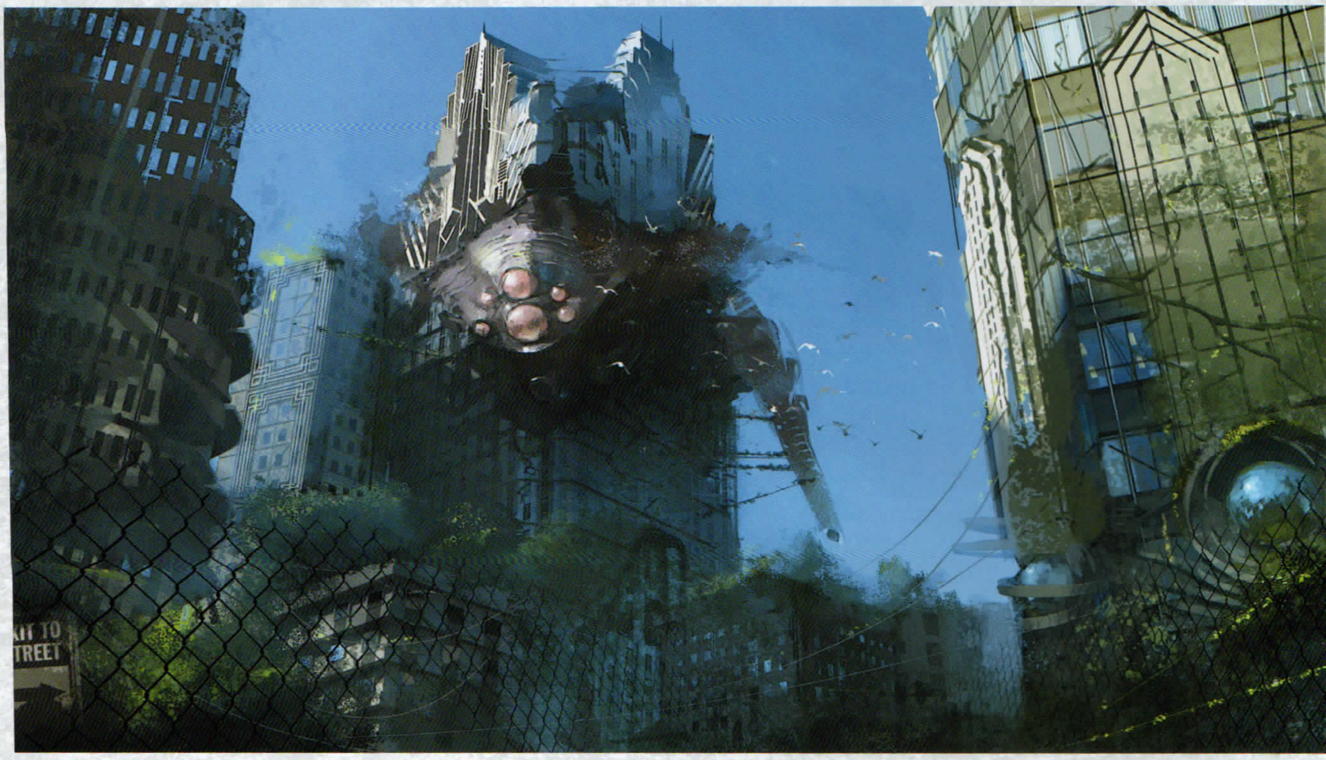
This is Colonel Samuel S. Helburn of the UCMA, highest ranking survivor of the Asgard Expeditionary force, date Jan 31st, 2671.

I have roughly 5000 combat effective men plus significant armour reserves remaining of the original force. A good number I reckon, given the circumstances. I'm in the process of withdrawing into the swamps to the North of Odinsburg, where we hopefully won't be a factor worth pursuing to those Republic bastards who set us up and the scum fighting with 'em. I'm sorry to have to report the loss of 3000 men, half our tanks and almost all our heavy dropships in the past 24 hours.

Resistance forces still loyal to us have permitted the use of a precious asset, a foldspace capable atmo-yacht. Apparently they've been storing her beneath the surface since the Scourge invasion. It's directly below our current position and we're under heavy fire. We're attempting to hold for long enough to get the engines up. She's rusty, but hopefully she'll fly and be too small to bother the Jellyheads.

We're aware that the nodes here are down, but I can input the code keys into the drive manually via encrypt-key to allow an accurate jump to the shipyards at Niccolum, that way at least this log might make it to the eggheads at Theory. Our node codes stay secure, even if it does mean I must be one of the last to leave. I'm the only officer left ranked high enough to have 'em and there's no damn way I'm giving them to anyone else, can't say people can blame me after what we've just been through.

Since the damn nodes are down, this'll be a one way trip for whoever goes. I'm staying of course, my troops need me. Breaking past the Scourge picket and whatever the PHR might have up there will be dangerous, so no point in sending more than one. Corporal Aramaki has volunteered and who am I to argue? He's got three kids back home and he's the best pilot I've got.



Short intel primer - PHR forces are in league with most of the local Resistance, who are themselves very well equipped. All our Strike Carriers were wrecked by PHR surprise attack and a few of our Lysanders were dashing to the outer marker last we heard. Hope those poor souls got out and that you know all this already. Our base will be the swamps about five clicks North of Odinsburg for now - no promises we won't have to move though.

We've deactivated our transponders and are using no distress beacons as I'm sure those techy Republic types will trace us easy if we leave 'em on. We'll be listening out for friendlies though so make some noise if anyone can come back for us. That last bit will be down to us I guess. Primary and only objective will be to find and reactivate a node or two so we can bring the green fury of the UCMA down on 'em!

We survived the attack, and we'll keep fighting. Colonel Sam Helburn, signing off.

The primary value of Col. Helburn's efforts is to inform us that there are some UCM personnel on Asgard left to extract, should we get a chance to affect a rescue.

As the Colonel states, it will be down to them to reactivate a node, otherwise there will be no possibility of returning to the Asgard system. In future, the immediate dropping of void based stealth nodes on arrival in a new system will be mandatory.

Failure to comply will trigger an immediate court martial of the most senior officer present. We simply cannot rely on old, surface based nodes - nor can all apparently 'friendly' Resistance groups be trusted. Further measures will need to be taken in future to ensure against such treachery.

Corporal Ryoto Aramaki was buried in space with full military honours and has posthumously been awarded the Fortitude Star, the highest honour for bravery in the service of the Colonies. Let us hope his sacrifice was not in vain. An MF-R rescue team is on constant readiness and prepped for immediate jump should a node be reactivated.

SETTING GAMES IN THE ASGARD SYSTEM - DESIGNER'S NOTES

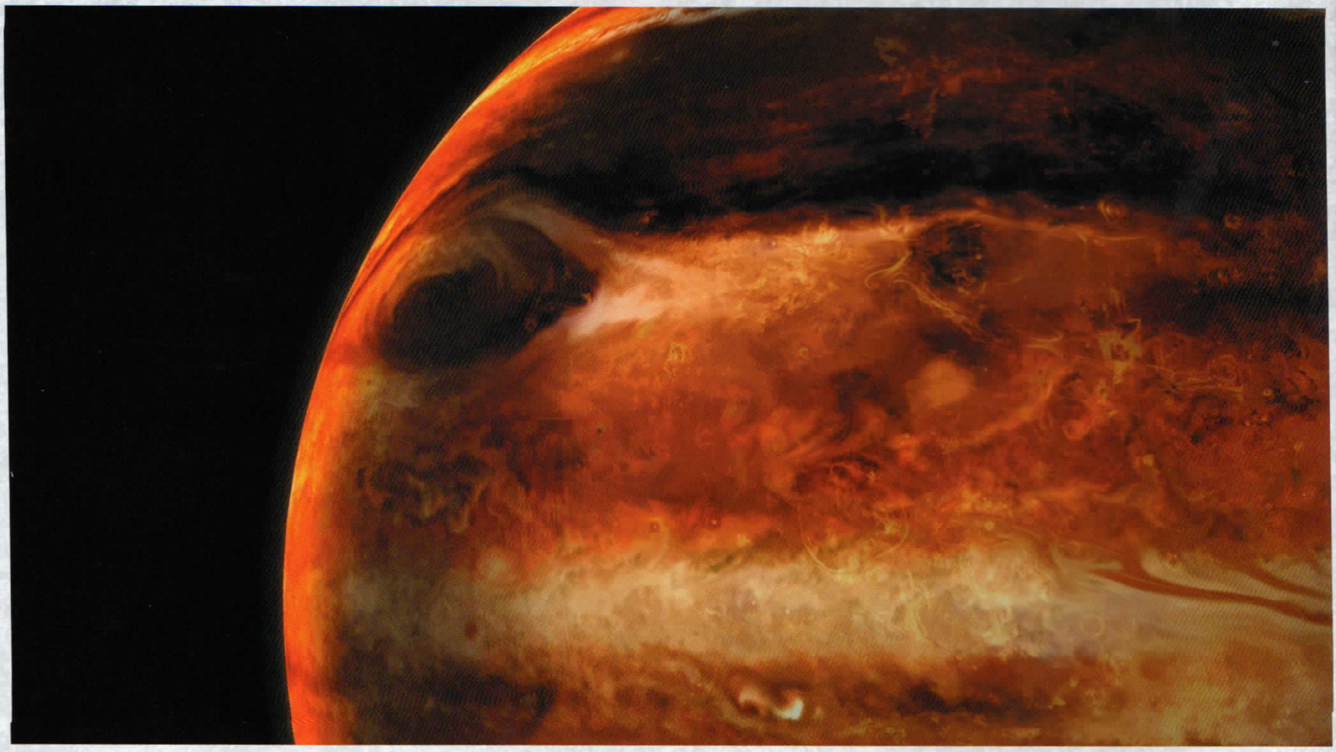
Although the planet is currently inaccessible to the Colonies, the UCM does have troops there, engaged in a desperate struggle for survival against multiple races. In addition to those suggested in ***Reconquest: Phase 1,*** here are some more ideas for gaming in this system:

1) The Exploits of Colonel Helburn - This character is a brand new playable Famous Commander introduced in this book (rules can be found later in the book, in the UCM Units section). His struggle to survive against the odds and to reactivate a foldspace node to bring in reinforcements will be crucial to the future of this theatre. Building a campaign around this character - possibly with finite resources - would be a good starting point.

2) Premeditated betrayal - Setting games around the premise of Resistance allies turning on UCM forces would be an interesting basis for games and allow for some unusual deployment options. Perhaps a few Resistance battlegroups can deploy right next to the UCM in an unbalanced match-up with a small PHR force, only for them to turn on their allies!

TLALOCAN THEATRE – RECON REPORTS

TLALOCAN



NAVAL INTELLIGENCE THEORIES DEPT. OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR: NICCOLUM, SEPT 28TH, 2671AD

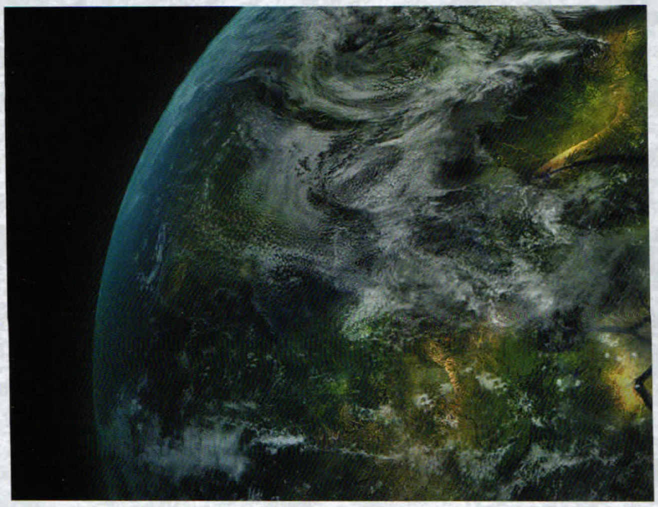
+ + + Classified level 7 - UCMF Supreme Admiral, UCMA Supreme Marshal, Office of the President and Naval Theory authorised personnel Eyes Only + + +

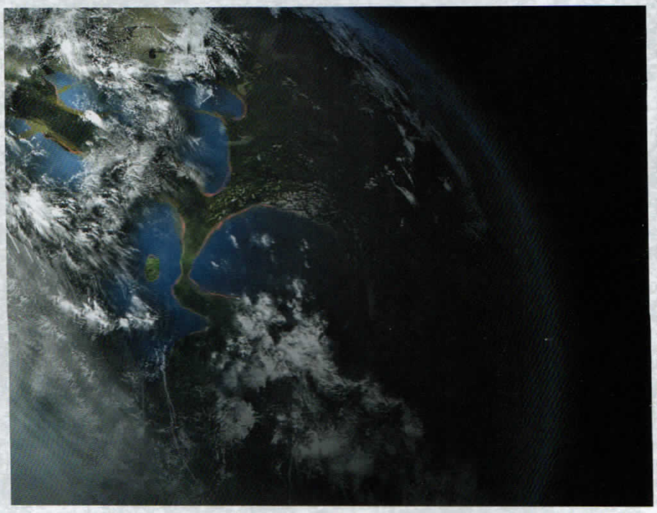
Madam President,

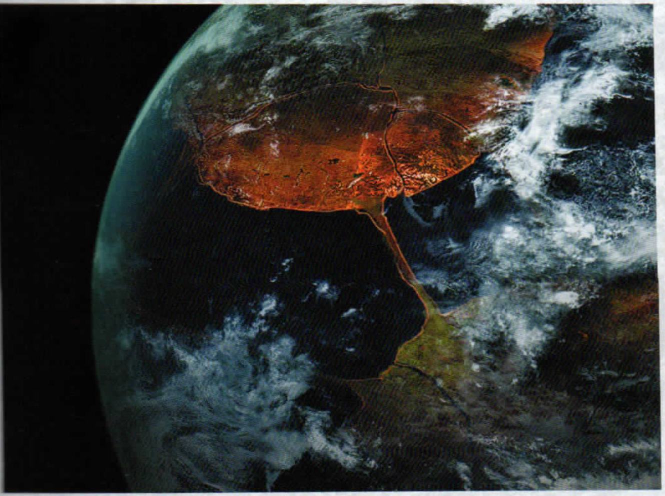
I have some more information for you concerning the Tlalocan system. I'm maintaining Level-7 classification for now as recent intelligence leaks suggest that a PHR spy is still at large on the High Council. It's still far from clear what kind of threat the Republic poses to us or what their purposes are, but I have recently received a report back from MF-B Team-9. This is one of the Black-Ops units we dispatched to ascertain the fate of Team-5, originally charged with following PHR activities on the Tlalocan Moons.

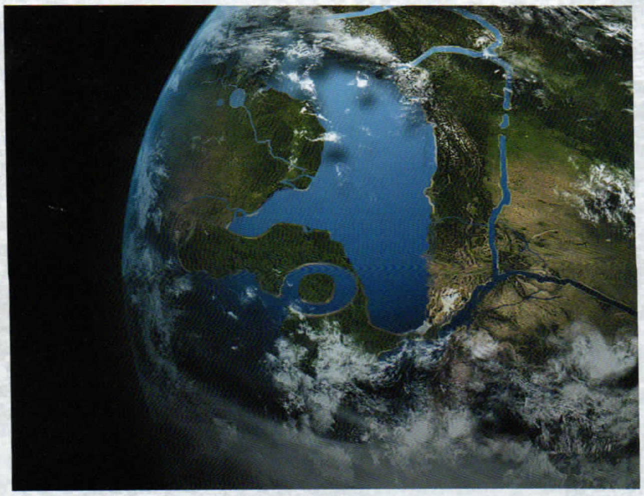
Unfortunately, we have no word on the fate of Team-6, which was sent along with Team-9. Their supplies are due to last out for another few months at least and MF-B teams run dark as a matter of routine so I do not think we need to be concerned as yet. Knowledge that this theatre is even open to us at all is strictly 'need to know' for now and I think we should keep it that way for the foreseeable future.

I enclose a copy of Team-9's most recent report in redacted form (logistical details and full statistics omitted) and I will follow with my analysis in brief.









ARMY INTELLIGENCE MEETING REPORT EXTRACT: FERRUM, OCT 12TH, 2671AD

+ + + Classified level 6 - High Council and Senior AHQ/Admiralty Staff Eyes Only + + +

The full scale PHR invasion of the Tlalocan moons seems to be entering its final stages, what we would term as Phase-3. It is certainly a sight to behold and quite unlike anything else occurring anywhere in the Reconquest. The numbers the Republic are bringing to bear here are unprecedented - we estimate 30% of the personnel and 60% of the materiel of a typical UCM invasion, which are numbers enough for this foe. The Scourge are pinned into several small pockets now and are being pounded by relentless conventional orbital bombardment and ground artillery fire. We estimate that all meaningful Scourge presence will be purged from the Moons in less than three weeks from the time of writing.

In already secure areas, the Republic is busy constructing surface structures and orbitals at a breathtaking rate - objectively amazing to behold. Unfortunately, this will make the Moons virtually impregnable to anything less than a full scale Eden Prime level invasion at our current tech capability. On that subject, we have captured several fascinating pieces of PHR equipment and have a small collection of bodies aboard for autopsy, which will be of particular interest to the Science Division. We will be making a delivery of these finds in a few weeks time, once we have retrieved our remaining personnel from the surface. Our supplies are running low and a return trip to Niccolum will be needed soon in any case.

Unfortunately, I must report our failure in locating Team-5 or learning anything about their fate. They seem to have disappeared without a trace. However, MF-B teams are of course adept at precisely that, so there is a strong possibility that they are still alive down there. If that's the case, the intel they must have by now would be a prize indeed. As per standing orders, we have made no attempt to make contact with Team-6, which is operating entirely independently from us. Perhaps they have had more luck in finding Team-5.

We have scheduled our return to Niccolum for Oct. 12th, surface extractions permitting. If these run into difficulties we have enough supplies to last us comfortably until the end of the year. Nerves, however, are wearing thin among the non-MF-B ship crew. The proximity of such a massive and frankly more advanced fleet is making them jumpy. Despite our top of the line stealth capabilities we all believe that we cannot hope to evade detection here forever. For myself and the other officers, we're trained for worse than this. This place gives me the creeps though (if you'll excuse the expression), I must admit. Something unique is going on here, I'm sure of it and I wish we knew more. Await further developments when we have them. It's getting increasingly dangerous to send foldspace communications back to base due to the ever closer PHR patrol sweeps, so time of next transmit is uncertain.

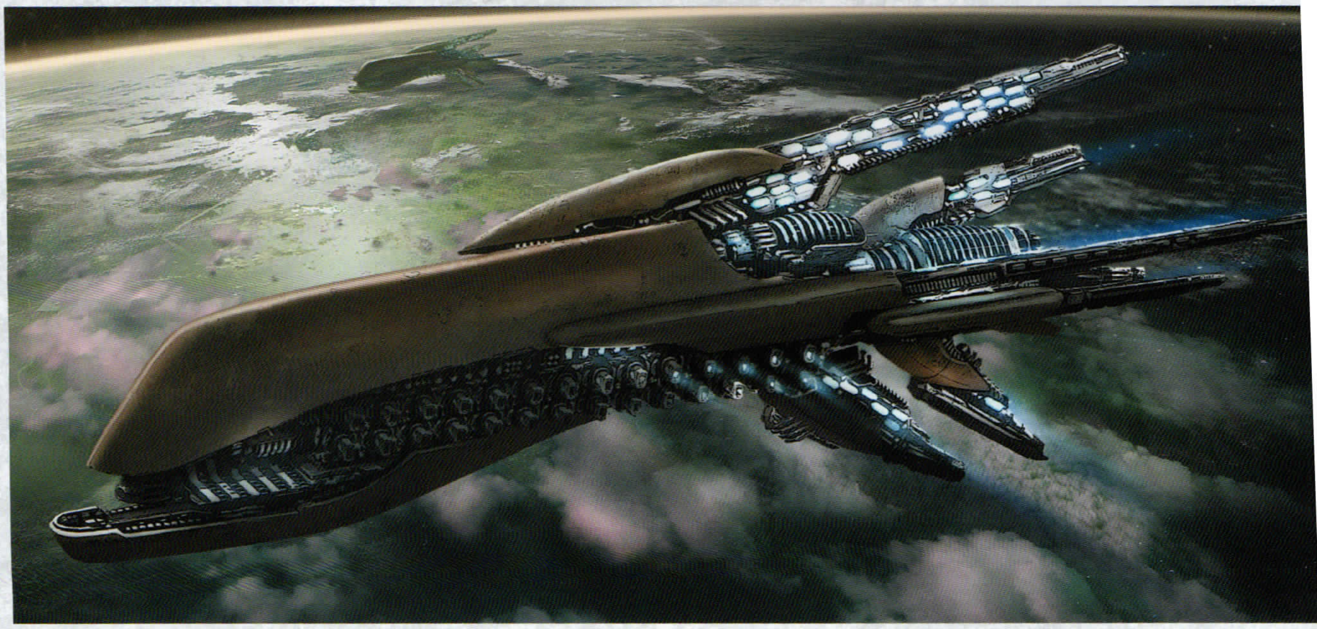
Yours,
Capt. Abdul Kane (MF-B9)

I concur with Cap. Kane in that this indicates the importance of the Moons to the PHR. The Republic has attempted nothing like this anywhere else and I admit to sharing an intense curiosity as to their purpose(s) there. Of course, it renders the possibility of a full scale invasion totally out of the question for the moment.

Frankly, we have our hands full with the Scourge and opening another front against a new and mysterious enemy would be foolhardy. Until we know more, I'm forced to conclude that we must accept Republic control of the system for the present.

It does however represent the very best intelliger gathering option we have against the PHR. I sugge assigning at least two more MF-B teams to the tas Teams 11 and 13 are prepped and ready to go aft their highly successful tour in the Elysium Syste Secrecy is paramount and we must hope that any F spies are outside this information bubble. Perha the physical intel Team-9 is due to bring back wi help us find ways of identifying Republic aligr technologies and/or giving us ways to utilize th ourselves. I await your approval to brief a dispatch the teams.

Your servant as always,
Admiral Chang, Director, UCMF Theories Dept.



[TECHNICAL NOTE - FOLDSPACE COMMUNICATIONS: This is currently the only way of sending information faste than light speed and of communicating in real time with a recipient in another system. These functio by using a FTL capable ship's drive to open a limited foldspace rupture, through which data can be sent This ship must be in a position where a jump is possible to transmit (i.e. at or beyond the outer marke of planetary bodies). This represents a severe limitation for ground forces, as a friendly ship must b on station to relay their signals, should the need to communicate beyond their own system arise.]

Master Sergeant Sian Carrow of MF-B13 paced the deck of the *Silent Blade* in a furious temper. She'd stormed out of the briefing for their next mission rather than lash out at that sanctimonious little insect from Theory once he'd done explaining why the whole damn Battlefleet wasn't jumping to Tlalocan right now. She'd had no idea, none, that the Moons were even accessible to them and even less that those PHR scumbags had made them their nest. Nest, that was the word, a coven of murderous vipers and the brass knew it, and still wouldn't bring the hammer down on their asses. Turned out the Republic was up to something massive and we were just going to sit back, take pictures and bring back a few souvenirs. A single hot tear splashed off the deck as she stopped pacing. It really wasn't helping.

Ever since she lost her brother to the betrayal on Asgard, she'd vowed to make the Republic pay. Nothing left to bury even, she didn't even know how he died. *KIA against Post Human Republic ground forces in Odinsburg, Asgard Prime, no remains recovered.* That was it (plus the generic 'service to mankind' bit of course). All she'd gotten from command by way of notice or explanation. The bastards would pay... She'd killed plenty of Scourge so far in this war, oh how she wanted to wring a few post-human necks... maybe she'd feel better then. She doubted it. It would never be enough.

She abruptly turned on her heels and left the empty rec room. Someone else would be along soon and she didn't want any of them to see her like this - tough girl image to maintain and all that. She'd go to gym 3, that would do. By far the worst one on the ship, with dust covering most of the equipment in there, she'd be alone to seethe in private.

As she began a round of bench presses, she considered what she might do. They were on top level isolation from the moment that briefing had finished, so no chance whatsoever to get this information out there. She couldn't be the only one that'd just let this slip by with no protest. There'd be riots on the streets of Aurum if the people knew, no love for the PHR there either, that's for sure... No, even if she could let the facts out, she wouldn't. She'd been trained for Black Ops, this level of security had to mean something. Her mind wasn't right at the moment, not balanced, not thinking straight, boiling over, that's all. Just breathe.

What she could do here and now was make damn sure to remind the rest of the team what the post-humans did to the likes of them, 'inferior beings' as they'd no doubt say in a maddeningly calm voices. She'd sow, nurture and mature the seeds of good old righteous hatred among the team, so if they did (oh glorious hope) get a chance to fight some of them, the guys would fight with full, honest rage. She smiled to herself... one of the guys... they were all guys in MF-B really, even if almost half of them were girls.

On her 37th lift of the weights, she felt a light prick on her neck. A normal person wouldn't pay attention to something so trivial when pumping iron and sweating buckets, but she was MF-B, not some farmboy from the Legions. She dropped the weight and spun her head round, eyes on stalks. Definitely no one in here and no way they could have got out in a few split seconds. She took a breath and touched her neck, a tiny spot of blood coming away on her fingertip. Weird... a bug maybe, must have been.

After a few more bench presses, something felt 'off'. A little light headed maybe... some tingling in the legs. She hadn't warmed up before this exercise, just got right on with it to work off the anger. That must be it... maybe a drink of water. As she walked to the corner fountain, she stumbled, her left foot jarring oddly and her balance all screwed up. Great, just great... back to her bunk, not the damn infirmary, she couldn't face the sheer embarrassment of that. Some R&R, read her book maybe, calm down.

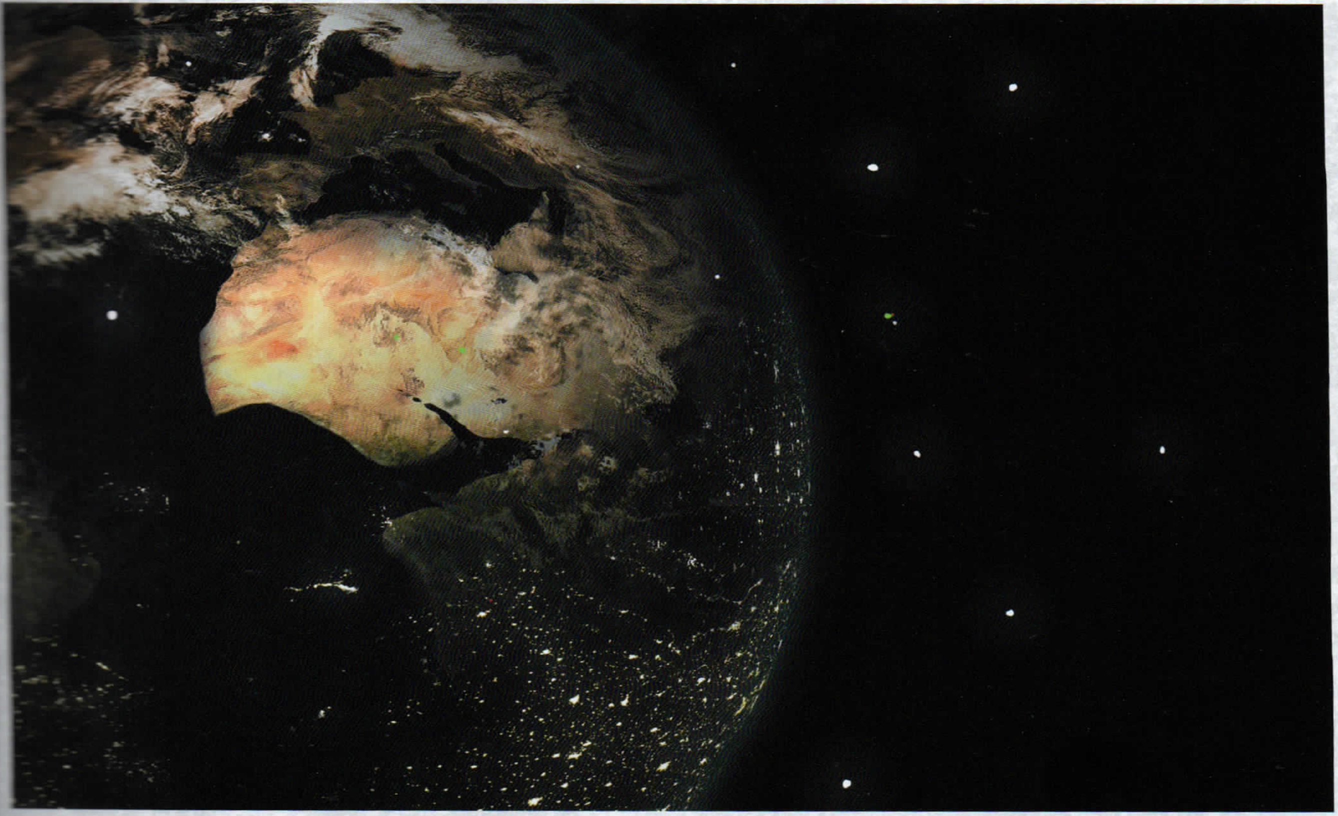
She barely made it from the room before her legs gave out from under her. As she crumpled to a heap on the floor of the empty corridor, she cast her eyes up for cameras. Someone would see and come to get her, hang the embarrassment. She was scared now. Noticing that all the cameras were pointing the wrong way, scared was suddenly no longer adequate. She'd been shot once, got concussion during training so often it was normal. This was SO much worse than that. Total loss of muscle control, she couldn't move an inch.

Suddenly, an unseen and powerful pair of hands grabbed her collar from behind and started to drag her along the corridor. She couldn't move her head at all, or her eyes. Vision was starting to grey out round the edges too, no chance of seeing who this guy was. Abruptly, she was pulled up and tossed into a small box of a room. "A necessary evil it seems. I'm sorry." Said a neutral voice behind her as the heavy door slowly closed. A REALLY heavy door. She could still think... through tunnel vision, she could suddenly see a red light sweeping round and round the little room over and over again, doubling her compulsion to throw up. By the red glow, she could make out the label 'Voidlock 12, Deck 2' just as a second door in front of her slammed open, decompression ripping her into the deathly embrace of cold, empty space.

SETTING GAMES IN THE TLALOCAN MOONS - DESIGNER'S NOTES

This theatre remains an entirely Black-Ops operation for the UCM, so the ideas presented in ***Reconquest: Phase 1*** are still very relevant at this point in the narrative. The introduction of two more MF-B teams to the fray adds to the possibilities of making a more complex campaign with more players. It's also clear that the PHR have been involved in many colossal battles against the Scourge here, which makes it a perfect place to set a campaign between those two forces specifically.

EARTH, AD2671



ADMIRALTY SITUATION REPORT: - SOLAR SYSTEM, OCT 19TH, 2671AD, D-UNSPECIFIED

+++ Classified level 2 - Senate and Ranking UCMA/F Officers Eyes Only +++

INTRODUCTION

As you will have read in the recently declassified (down from Level 5 to level 2) accounts attached to the D+250 report, the situation in the home system is grim. Massive enemy concentrations coupled with heavy industrialisation and reinforcement make the prospect of retaking our origin planet daunting.

However, if Earth is viewed as the ultimate and final reserve of Scourge military power, the picture changes. More recent reports indicate that a considerable portion of Scourge fleet assets have since been diverted to the Olympus theatre, where a great many of them were destroyed in the massive engagement there.

In addition, word from our Resistance allies on the ground indicates that a significant proportion of Scourge ground forces are being lifted from the planet as we speak, presumably to bolster their losses in other theatres. While this means that our armies elsewhere must be ready to deal with waves of Scourge reinforcements, it is hoped that these will be spread thinly between the Cradle Worlds.

ORBITAL OPERATIONS

A large number of low-key reconnaissance ops are currently underway with the continuing mission of building up a detailed picture of the theatre for battle planners. Fleet support for these endeavours is exclusively in the form of Lysander class stealth lighters as these are the only ships we can count on to make it past the enemy undetected.

There has been no sign of the mysterious enemy that destroyed the *Azure Night* near Callisto and all indications are that it was of non-Scourge origin. The Admiralty believes that the Lysanders are proof against Scourge ships at least and seem to be evading PHR ships in other theatres acceptably. As such, the unknown foe was most likely Shaltari, although this is unconfirmed.

Policy is to give Callisto a wide-birth while we conduct ops elsewhere for the moment. Naval Theory is working on a plan to reconnoitre this moon without the use of Lysanders and will report back in due course.

ORBITAL OPERATIONS - EUROPA

+ + + This section Classified level 6 - High Council, Supreme Admiral and Naval Theory authorised personnel Eyes Only + + +

Besides planning and conducting a considerable number of recon missions, Naval Theory is beginning to work on the first plan to actively damage the enemy in the Solar system. The target has been identified as Europa, one of Jupiter's moons. It has been discovered that 'pure' Scourge require water unfettered by biological contaminants for optimal existence. Pure Scourge are all those without living hosts, most notably almost all vehicle crews and machine operators.

The massive frozen H_2O reserves which are devoid of all life on Europa are a perfect and almost limitless source which may well be supplying a large portion of the enemy with vital sustenance. Purification of water is of course possible and indeed common but the Scourge have devoted considerable recourses to extraction here.

Theory is working on a daring plan to form a temporary but substantial force (designated: Taskforce Europa) to attack and destroy these facilities, then jump away before a coordinated response can be brought to bear by the Scourge. This will deny a significant portion of one of the most vital resources to the enemy, causing great disruption that may aid a future invasion of Earth. Only fast ships will be employed and speed as well as absolute secrecy will be required. Europa is currently lightly defended (for a system with such a high concentration of Scourge ships) and the element of surprise will be crucial.

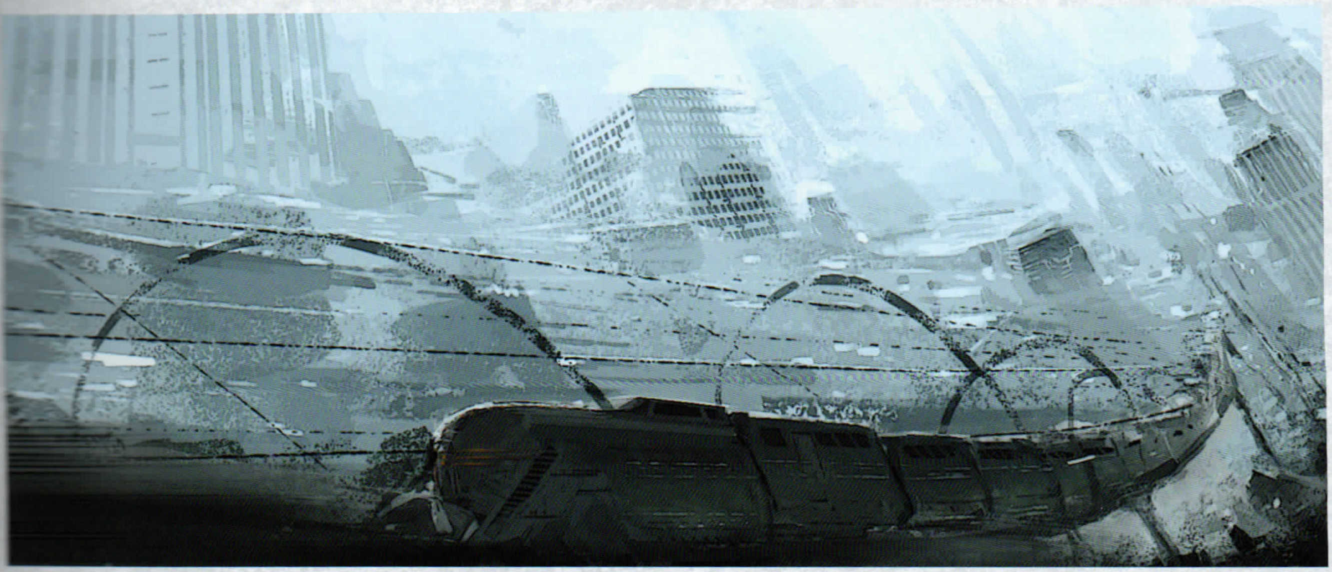
A Strike Carrier based ground assault element will also be needed as the two largest facilities are subterranean and largely invulnerable to orbital bombardment. Surface temperatures outside the atmospherically normalised grav-compensated Scourge facilities are a lethal -150 degrees Celsius so all combat units must be fully winterised and deploy in sealed transports. The insertion teams will be furnished with tactical nuclear demolition charges, to be activated once extraction is complete.

Naval Theory is currently in the process of assembling the fleet under the guise of a live fire exercise over Niccolum. They will shortly be provided with encrypted jump coordinates and sealed orders that are only to be opened once the translation to Jupiter's outer marker is complete. This operation already has Presidential approval and is scheduled to commence on Nov. 1st.

SURFACE OPERATIONS - EARTH

All surface ops on Earth itself are still strictly non-combative. The enemy is simply too numerous and well entrenched for offensive operations to make a serious impact at this time. However, we have had some success in coordinating with and linking up Resistance groups and may be able to consider commencing guerrilla warfare activities against the enemy shortly.

In addition, massive amounts of useful intel has already been gathered, with more pouring in on an almost weekly basis. One curious pattern seems to be emerging around the area of New York City. Large groups of Resistance appear to be heading that way, unguided by our influence but clearly with some great purpose. It must be noted that the deserter Lt. Colonel Rodriguez was last seen in the area and it is possible that he is using Colonial equipment to assist in this. We will be directing two MF-R teams to the region shortly to investigate further.



SURFACE OPERATIONS - SECONDARY PLANETS

Almost every vaguely habitable body in the solar system has considerable enemy presence. Most planets and moons are deeply inimical to human (or Scourge) life outside compensated structures. Unfortunately these structures are sealed and very difficult to penetrate covertly. Nevertheless, plans to infiltrate some captured pre-war facilities on Mars and Titan are being drafted as substantial enemy activity has been identified by orbital scans here. AHQ and the Admiralty await these plans for approval.

SETTING GAMES IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM - DESIGNER'S NOTES

The UCM still has a very modest presence in system, but this is set to change soon with the planned operations. In addition to those suggested in ***Reconquest: Phase 1,*** here are some more ideas for gaming in this system:

1) Guerrilla activity - The growing and inspired Resistance groups that have made contact with UCM recon teams will likely be keen for some action and it's only a matter of time before they start the ground war on Earth themselves. You could stage the very first true battle on the home planet for over 160 years or run a campaign based on a growing insurgency against the Scourge.

2) What's happening in New York? - This section of the book is written from the UCM's perspective, who still know very little of Lt. Colonel Rodriguez. This character is now playable and has his own entry as a Famous Commander in this book (rules can be found later in the book, in the Resistance Units section) which details more of his exploits since deserting the UCMA. His attempts to take direct action through rallying the Resistance of New York City would make for an engaging series of games!

3) The Europa Raid - The ground assault element of this planned operation would be a good place to stage the very first full scale engagement in our home system. As another underground setting, some of the scenery made for other theatres (such as the Styx Moon) could be re-used here. You could also use a board where the scenery (and environmental rules) changes as troops move into a massive Scourge facility via a frozen, low-grav wasteland.

In the corner of his dank and murky holding cell, Corporal Jim Huxley of the Maganum IInd Colonial Legion lurked, scratching the 128th name into the soft masonry of the wall with a discarded chicken bone. "Kaine", he muttered, still scratching away. He'd been at this for a few weeks – something to relieve the monotony and remind the world that someone out there still remembered their names. Even Quincy... *sanctimonious little fool*... got a memorial. They'd all been lost in the opening hours of the invasion of Atlantia City, Eden Prime. Most of the poor blighters fresh out of basic with no clue what real war and plasma fire did to human bodies. He shuddered, remembering for the millionth time the moment when Jonson's screaming head was atomised in their ill fated dash from the wreckage of their APC. The fact they'd been 'rescued' shortly afterwards by his current tormentors was no comfort whatsoever.

There had been no sound from his adjoining cell for several days... maybe Hagnaar had finally succumbed to his arm wound. Huxley had become so acquainted with the big man's sounds of barely suppressed agony that he'd filtered them out – just another horror to heap on the mountain of misery he'd endured here for months. He had no idea what had become of his other squadmates Charlie, Nadia and Alma... Alma... he owed that woman his life twice over. He prayed to whatever voice might be listening that he got a chance to repay that debt someday.

Breaking the oppressive silence, a rusty iron door creaked slowly open and quiet footsteps approached, accompanied by the light jingle of keys. Huxley instinctively shrank further into the corner of his cell, an animal response fuelled by his fervent desire not to lose another finger to the torturers. As the key turned slowly in the lock, he gazed into the terrifying visage of his latest nightmare. This was the face of a true psychopath – one of the very worst of the tyrant Salakahn's elite Guard.

Inexplicably, the monster raised both hands in a conciliatory gesture and raised a finger to his scarred and chapped lips. Seconds later, terror transformed into incredulity as behind the creature stood Hagnaar (white as a sheet), Charlie and Nadia. The grins two of their faces further added to the fog of confusion. Charlie rushed to his side, pulled him to his feet and enveloped him in a bear hug. For the first time in months, Huxley cracked a smile. The muscles in his face hurt; he'd forgotten what smiling felt like.

"This guy", spluttered Charlie, "busted us out, killed three guards to do it, quiet as you like. Unbelievable! You're ok?"

"I'll live. Damn it's good to see you guys!" spluttered Huxley.

"Keep it down" growled Hagnaar quietly. Despite his obviously poor health, Huxley chided himself for writing this guy off so soon. One of the toughest farmboys the legions had to offer.

Nadia had said nothing so far, staring vacantly into the middle distance, posture slumped. One look at her ashen face told Huxley a great deal about how she'd been treated by their captors. Huxley strode to the once confident Legionnaire. "Up you get Private," he said, pulling her up straight and tall. "You're of the II'nd. Tough as nails. Remember when you bashed Quincy's head with that tray in the mess? Served him right the little worm, didn't it?" Huxley smiled conspiratorially.

"It did..." she said, as the ghost of a grin flashed across her otherwise vacant features.
"It's good to see you Corp, really. Thanks for that... reminds me... who I was... am, I guess."

“That’s the spirit,” said Huxley as he turned to their mysterious saviour who’d been allowing them this little reunion with a poorly concealed lack of patience.

“I’m not what you think I am,” the man said in an entirely unexpected softly lilted accent, the distinct cadence of Niccolum. “I’m with Naval Intelligence. Been embedded here for months but it’s time to leave. Now. Something’s happening and I’m breaking cover, got a bad feeling. Had to try and get you guys out with me. Come on, one more cell to breach.”

As they left this cell block Huxley had to step over several bodies. Four guards, all once hardened thugs, all very dead. He hadn’t heard a thing before... Incredible. Two left turns, one right, up a flight of steps. Their progress through the dungeons was purposeful and direct. This guy, whoever he was, clearly knew his way around.

Just as Huxley was musing to himself about how empty of people this place was, they turned into a new corridor and the spy held his right arm up in a fist. The little ragtag squad behind him stopped instinctively. Seconds later, the man was running full tilt at the three shocked guards emerging from the shadows. The first dropped like liquid a heartbeat later, throat spraying gore. The second swung an axe at the spy, who wasn’t where he should be. A second heartbeat and the axe wielder was dead, neck twisted from behind. The third lasted another heartbeat before his shocked face was slammed through a steel bracket in the wall. *Damn...*

“Quick, let’s get her and be out,” said the spy, not even out of breath, throwing a key to Huxley. “Hey? Hello? What the...?” said a quiet voice from the nearest cell as Huxley fumbled with the key in the lock. He opened the cell door and dashed to the dishevelled figure in the corner. As he got close, her leg swung out, crashing him to the floor. Then she was on him, chunk of brick in hand, raised to strike. After a moment’s hesitation she dropped the makeshift weapon, disbelief on her grimy face. “Hux? Really? That you?”

“Yes...” he coughed, “Should’ve guessed you’d try something like that... My tailbone kills,” he winced, pulling her into a tight and lasting hug. “I wish I could say I saved you but I’d be lying. There’s this guy... from Naval Intel, saved us all. Got to get out of here now, we’ll catch up later. He says there’s something going on and I agree, it’s far too quiet here, almost no one about.”

“Up you get then,” said Alma, her swift and practical manner back in an instant, clearly unfazed, at least on the surface, by whatever she’d endured in this horrible place. Pulling Huxley to his feet, she dashed to the rest of the squad to greet them swiftly before following the spy, who was already leaving the corridor.

As they climbed ever closer to the surface, Huxley thought he felt the occasional shake of the earth through his boots. *Earthquake? No... bombardment. Battle.* A massive engagement was clearly in full swing above, his cell had just been too deep to feel it. They turned left into another small corridor and two more guards were dead in as many seconds, their lives snuffed out by this consummate killer before they could draw their weapons. The man unlocked the door and barrelled into the small room they were guarding. “Armoury,” said the spy brusquely, “take what you need. Nothing too big though” he snapped, catching Hagnaar’s look of glee as he hefted a heavy machinegun, draping a belt of old school ammo over his shoulder. As the big guy checked its capacious chamber and smiled a truly malicious smile, the spy shrugged, resigned.

“Hey!” exclaimed Charlie as they stepped back over the two bodies outside the armoury, “This scumbag took my hat!” Placing the Stetson back on his head with deep satisfaction, Charlie made way for the rest of the squad.

“To the surface,” barked the spy, “we’re heading to the garage, we need a ride out of here.”

The dazed band of recently liberated captives clung for dear life to the pickup truck as it careened out of the artfully concealed garage and into the blessed open air. Weapons up, each one of them inhaled in unison, as if they'd never breathed outside air in their lives. Sadly, this air was far from the freshness they expected. It was laced with the stench of burning fuel, synthetics and flesh. As the pickup bumped over yet another corpse, Corporal Huxley cast his blinking, stinging eyes around.

Utter carnage greeted them. A complete overload of the senses. Explosions, smoke and fire enveloped the insignificant little band like a cacophonous shroud. Buildings collapsed in the distance and flights of aircraft screamed overhead.

"Seraphim!" shouted Alma, "they're ours!" A flight of Corsairs followed swiftly after, plasma cannons blaring.

"Eye's front!" Barked the nameless spy. Instantly, Hagnaar opened up with his heavy machinegun, rending an entire squad of Scourge warriors to bloody tatters from behind. An insane grin of pure pleasure racked his visage as the gun cooled, raindrops turning to steam on its sizzling barrel.

"You fire that thing near my face again and I'll... I'll..." seethed Charlie in (mostly) mock anger. Totally unhearing, Hagnaar simply winked back.

"The frontlines are close," said the spy once they had swerved into an empty street. "The UCMA are closing on the city centre. Salakahn took most of his men out earlier. The Legions have shoot on sight orders for all Resistance here, since they're all with Him. This means we look like fair targets too. We'll stand no chance in this warzone, caught between two armies. No one's going to give us time to talk, we'll need to get clear. Added complication, the PHR are here too. I've got some intel on their activities, spotted something just yesterday after my last report. Got to get it to NI ASAP."

"What? Them too? What are they up to?" asked Huxley,

"Classified son. Crucial stuff though, might help solve some things, just a piece in the puzzle I think. That's all you need to know."

"Fine. We'll help you get out best we can, we hardly want to be stuck in the middle of this any more than you! Thanks, by the way. Never got a moment to say it."

"It was nothing. Wasn't going to let fellow Colonials die down there. Just sorry there was no way of getting you out sooner. With this battle and my gut feelings... was time to blow my cover and get the hell out. Salakahn's got something planned beyond just running, I'm sure of it. The faster we're out of this city, the better."

Grim faced, the spy kept driving, full throttle towards the outskirts and the battle. "We'll have to punch right through the lines. They're fighting Scourge there I think, not Ferals. There's a good chance we'll slip through. Get ready, check weapons."

As they rounded the next bend, a simultaneous outpouring of panic rippled through the squad as the rusty little pickup careened straight between the six legs of a colossus of a war machine, a tower of incongruously smooth armour plates. “Nemesis! PHR! Duck!” The truck just cleared the chin of the thing and emerged on the other side, the monstrous construct now facing their tail. *No time to stop and gawp. Just drive. Drive!*

Seconds later, a pair of ignited railgun contrails ripped overhead, the air momentarily sucked from their lungs. Gasping, and with no idea if the shots were directed at them, they kept driving. Seconds later, a vast beam of incandescence tore through the wet air high above, lightly scorching the exposed skin of the squad. The massive tail gun had fired, but not at them. In the distance, a flare of devastating energy erupted, cutting to the core of a similarly massive Scourge walker, causing its reactor to rupture as it died in a coruscating ball of superheated plasma.

Distracted by this, the line of Scourge warriors taking their positions in the next block were taken completely by surprise by the lone pickup as it shot through their lines, the cluster of Legionnaires on its back venting their adrenaline with full auto fire. *Empty clip. Reload. Empty clip. Reload.* Hagnaar was a towering pillar of pure emotion, unleashing months of pent up hate in a torrent of heavy machinegun fire. His barrel was glowing red hot by this point, and just as his last belt of ammo ran dry, a lucky plasma bolt from the warriors caught him in the torso, coring his entire chest cavity into glowing embers. As he fell from the vehicle, Huxley grabbed Nadia and Charlie, wrenching them to down and out of the withering fire that had just erupted from above.

Two small aerial craft were on their tail. “Monitors!” shouted Huxley, looking around wildly for Alma. Calmly, she pulled herself back into a firing stance. She’d handled herself well, Huxley had known she would. With deadeye aim, she sent the first Monitor into a spiral, ending its miserable existence against a tower block. Huxley took the second with a shot from the RPG he’d been carrying as backup, blowing the thing to bits in mid air.

“I think we’re clear!” shouted the spy. “I’m driving till we’re well out of the city... want to... get clear”. Huxley heard the faltering in his voice and clambered to the cab. “Shoulder. Clean through-and-through... ugh... I’ll live.” Not sure of this statement, Huxley silently took the wheel. He’d make sure their saviour got to give his report to Naval Intel if it was the last thing he did, he owed the man that much.

“Don’t talk, just keep pressure on it. Nadia? You OK back there?”

“Sir,” she said, clambering to the cab also. As the squad’s backup medic, she’d be able to help. “I took some basic stuff from the armoury on my way out. Thought we’d need it.” She said, opening the catches of medkit. Her calling coming to the fore, she seemed to have banished her earlier lethargy.

As he stared at the open road ahead, Huxley had a sudden feeling of deep foreboding. This guy had REALLY wanted to get out today, right now. Surely it would have made more sense to wait it out in the deepest cells for this thing to run its course? The UCMA’s victory here must be a matter of time? Was there something he didn’t want to voice, or was it just as he’d said – instinct.

Without warning, a blinding, burning flash seared his vision as a colossal, citywide blast erupted behind them.

OCTOBER 21ST, 2671, 9:05AM,
HIGH COUNCIL BUILDING, AURUM CITY, AURUM.

President Belaque cast her eyes around the barren conference room, taking in the empty chairs and dark screens. Instead of the lively hubbub and debate of a council meeting, all was still. The only movement was the soft, slow rustle of the UCM pennant suspended above the centre of the table, shifting to the current of unseen and unfelt ventilation.

The solitude was welcome. She valued the silence, the stillness. She always liked to spend time here ahead of meetings, getting acquainted with the subject at hand well before anyone could arrive and cloud her mind with opinions other than her own. She had been here for hours already, reading through the unpublished D+500 report for the fourth time, still no closer to the answers she sought. In this instance, with this document, keeping her own council would likely matter very much.

The High Council and the Office of the President had always been honest with the truths they revealed to a wider audience. Of course, much of the information was kept to higher levels of clearance – this was only natural during a war. President Belaque had never openly lied to her people, but she was contemplating doing so now. The report was so... neutral, in places verging on pessimistic, almost defeatist.

She opened it for a fifth time, each line she re-read giving her a sense of quiet unease. No one could be in any doubt that the Reconquest was far from on track. It was beset by so many small but significant problems, so many unforeseen setbacks. The larger things could never be hidden of course; the massive fleet losses at Olympus; the PHR assault on Shangri-La; the annihilation of Atlantia City.

However, perhaps the tone... the exclusion of certain details... She sighed to herself.

History had taught mankind so many times in the past that such conceits only lead to ruin in the end, all the more painful for the sudden tearing of a veil from the eyes of the honest and the credulous.

She was painfully aware that out there right now; millions upon millions of her soldiers were in mortal peril should the Reconquest falter, and scores more friends, relatives and lovers at home praying for their return.

No despair, none. She would not permit it.

Despair is the slow death of hope and ambition.

That would surely put an end to any good future that might await mankind. No lies would be told.
But delivery... that would be crucial. This would be a moment to step up and show her people what it meant to stand proudly defiant against setbacks. To show the people a strong, fighting leader.
In a few hours' time her speech to the officers of the UCMA and the Fleet would be broadcast ahead of the dissemination of the report. The report would not be altered, she would not stoop to that. She'd asked for the honest facts, and that's what she'd received.

If only they were better facts... Still, this would have to be the speech of her life, that much was certain. She'd make sure of it. There were still a few hours remaining before the Council was due to join her – she would make good use of the time, the stillness, and above all, the silence.

She cast her eyes back to her handwritten notes for the speech, and had the sudden urge to screw the whole lot up and start over. It wouldn't do somehow.

Too many platitudes, too much sentimentality, not enough fight. Iron resolve, steely resolution. Courage. It would need plenty of that of course, in both content and delivery.

She looked around the room once more, contemplating its walls, the blank screens, the vacant chairs. The atmosphere had altered. The silence she had wrapped around her like a warm blanket now felt oppressive and chilling; her longed for solitude, a curse.

Very suddenly she had never felt more alone, the weight of her office too heavy to bear. Her hands began to shake as she reached into her jacket, desperately seeking the discreet pill box in her inner pocket.

It would all be better soon, never mind that she'd already taken them...

The door to the council chamber abruptly slammed open. President Belaque removed her rock steady hand from the pocket with superb reflexes for one approaching 50.

Shock. Adrenaline. Action. Maybe these were all that she needed to straighten herself out. This quiet prison was no place for her brand of fire. Fire was what she most surely needed right now.

She composed herself, and looked into the face of the breathless communications officer who had almost collapsed into the room. One look at the eyes was enough. She would need her fire now.

"Madam President", the young woman gasped, "It's... it's..."

"Calm down Lieutenant. Breathe. Compose yourself."

The bedraggled officer took a second to gulp down a lung-full of air before lurching on.

"An incoming vis-link ma'am... from... from the Scourge."

Several seconds of stunned silence followed this revelation. Over 160 years since 'contact' with the vile enemy. Not a single attempt to communicate with or speak to a human. After so long, most thought them incapable of doing so, or so disdainful of mankind that they would not deign to stoop to it. Humans had never attempted to speak to cattle, after all. President Belaque had the latter belief there – speech was a simple thing really. They must never have had a cause so pressing as to do it thus far, which begged the question, *why now?*

"Are the rest of the Council aware of this?" asked the President.

"Some are Ma'am – those that arrived early are on their way up right now. We can patch the link through to here."

"Fine. I'll await them then, but be quick - I don't want to lose that link. Two minutes, then open the link, full quorum or no."

As the communications officer stumbled from the room, the President adjusted her posture, an icy calm clamping down over her earlier bout of weakness.

She looked down at the unwavering still of her hand.

This is the woman they voted for. Not some snivelling doubter. Let's get on with this sideshow, then get back to killing the blighted things.

"Helena," gasped the rotund man that had just stumbled in, griping the doorframe for support, "is it true? Are they really..."

"Yes, Robert, it would seem so. Anything that can make Lieutenant Dawkins turn white as a sheet and blunder around the building like yourself must surely be real. Sit down. I'm amazed you made it up here first quite frankly." A small trace of a smile passed her face, but was gone before High Councillor Robert Grey took his seat. He was swiftly followed by High Councillor Horatio Tamsin, and another man and three women, all equally out of breath. Carlotta Danzi came last, spilling her coffee down her immaculate suit while crossing the threshold when she saw the conference screen, which had just that second blazed into life.

A hauntingly pallid, almost albino visage started into the room from the cold screen. Beads of hot sweat trickled slowly down the once human alabaster of its face, its red eyes gazing piercingly at the disgruntled High Council members hastily taking their seats. Were it not for the occasional twitch of facial muscles, the observers might have been viewing a still image.

The creature's facial tics told of an inner turmoil, but the emotion radiated though every detail of that expression was hate. Pure and unfettered.Seething, limitless, merciless hate.

Once the shock of seeing a living Scourge face blown up ten feet high had subsided, the Councillors took in the rest. Behind the figure shone countless stars and a suggestion of an organic-like structure surrounding them – the viewports from the bridge of a ship perhaps? An oppressive and sticky humidity seemed to caress the figure like ghostly fingers, adding to the creature's sweat and condensing on its metallic gorget. In the distance, a single yellow planet loomed, too small to discern clearly. Where was this place the President wondered? Foldspace comms were almost impossible to trace but the exact duration of the audio delay might tell them something. If it was a known world, the star map and planet's colouring would tell them more. Aurum's High Council building had the very best analysts in the Colonies on site and she'd bet they were working frantically on this signal right now.

The creature still hadn't said anything when three more High Councillors cannoned into the room, the second almost falling over when faced with the screen. The third caught him, steadied him and led him to his seat. The first gave President Belaque's shoulder a small and reassuring squeeze as he walked past, his gait steady.

Jonas she thought without needing to turn round. Wolfrum's High Councillor Jonas Crowe was one of her oldest friends – a man she could always trust to be steady in a crisis. He certainly hadn't spilt his coffee or fallen over in the face of the monster before them. As he took his seat, Lieutenant Dawkin's voice came over the speakers.

"The rest are at least half an hour out Madam President".

"Fine, Lieutenant. Let's not wait any longer. Seal the chamber and put us in maximum seclusion. No external outputs for this meeting, it stays between us for now. That includes you and your team." "Very well Ma'am, sealing the chamber now."

As the doors slammed closed, a sudden, chilling silence filled the room. There was no comfort this time – it was the held breath before a storm. Who should speak first? How do you address the greatest blight ever to curse your race? The Scourge speaker solved their problem for them, and opened with a cracked, mocking chuckle.

"Ahh... welcome. So encouraging that you would converse with us. A good start."

"Do you have a name?" asked the President.

"Names are for the selfish, the small minded…and pets, President Helena Alma Belaque of Aurum." sneered the creature.

"You know who I am. How dare you address me in that tone? If you wish this discussion to continue you will show me some damned respect!"

"This one apologises," a rasping breath that could have been mocking or sincere. She couldn't tell, and it was gone a moment later as the creature continued.

"For us, the notion of a single, small, feeble and isolated mind representing your entire species is... quaint. You do this on purpose, do you not? By design? Quite interesting really... the self of an individual with... power... over the many... but this one digresses.

We have not opened this channel for pleasantries or for ruminations on our obvious differences. We are bending to this necessity for a purpose, to convey truths. You will listen?"

Again its tone was vague. Was it asking, or demanding? Offering information or condescending as if to a child? The President took suitable time to pause, reigning in her mounting temper.

I will not rise to this… thing. The Council members looked to her with questioning eyes. She took another moment before responding.

"Yes. For whatever these 'truths' may be worth. We shall hear them, and judge them for ourselves."

"Very well", sneered the creature.

"Our species and your own have been labouring under a delusion; that this war is ours, and of our making. The truth is that all have been manipulated and shepherded into this arena by others with no love for any but themselves. Even such as you can understand what this one speaks of?"

Amid the stunned and questioning silence, Councillor Muller mumbled, "The Republic?"
This brought a short, derisive laugh from the Scourge

"The new things? No. No, this has been in the making for far longer than they have even existed. Their presence has... complicated things, that is all. No, this one does not speak of them."

Only one other option remained.

The Shaltari, she thought.

"Yessss..." Hissed the Scourge, eyes fixed on the President.
"It is clear. You understand finally," it said, the expression of pure loathing on its face intensifying.

"They have been working in the shadows for centuries to engineer this war. They seeded your Cradle Worlds with the mewling beginning of your species, and after your numbers had bloated sufficiently, they laid you at our feet. Subtle redirection of a ship's course, influence in a hundred other ways to place you before us. Such perfect hosts... so numerous... so prolific. Too delicious to ignore."

"From there it was a simple matter to infiltrate the rest of your major systems, ignorant as you were. Our natural instinct led us to attack without question. The sweetmeats were so inviting, we did not ask who was serving to us. Unfortunate for the Shaltari that you proved too feeble at the time to offer us much resistance, divided and weakened as you were. The Sphere curio had a hand in that, we know. Ever since, the Shaltari have been thwarting our efforts to find you – the hosts had left before the meal was finished, and we were denied; your precious Colonies survived."

"You played right into their hands with this 'Reconquest', and since it began they have been intervening in many little ways, never allowing decisive endings while we are all so numerous. Their goal is the slow death by war of both species. For them, the victors must be so mangled, cowed and broken by the conflict that it will be a simple matter to sweep away the remnants." Its gaze moved around the room, taking in the Councillors one by one with contempt.

He thinks us weak. He thinks they will win. The thought steeled her resolve. Potential truths about the Shaltari or not, she would not let this happen.

"You think this knowledge will change our course in some way?" Her tone was measured, but hard. "It doesn't change what you are or what you've done. The deaths and enslavement of billions must be answered. They will be answered. If the Shaltari indeed had a hand in this, then their perfidy will be routed out in kind, once we have dealt with you. Ad Vindictam. For Vengeance. To this we hold."

"BE SILENT, WHELP! This one does not taunt like a snivelling adolescent, or tell you tales to amuse. This is as a prelude. This one's race offers you terms for a ceasefire, to deal with the Shaltari scum unencumbered by your annoyances. You will withdraw from your Cradle Worlds, save Eden and Elysium, which you may keep as a sign of our largess – be thankful you are allowed as much. You will cease void operations against us. Once done, we *may* consider permitting what remains of your race to exist."

After a few seconds of tense silence, the President responded brusquely.
"We will not."

The Scourge somehow seemed to expect this, and its reply came smooth and sharp as the edge of a killer's knife.

"You should know that failure to comply will have immediate consequences, for you and your race. Think carefully before you make so rash a choice. There will be no second chance, no moment to reconsider. Decide wisely, or you will shortly wish you had considered our offer more carefully. That document on your desk does not roar with the false bluster you now display. Take your time, we will keep this channel open and await your response."

The President opened her line to the comms office.

"Lieutenant Dawkins, suspend the outward feed for the moment."
"Very good Ma'am."

As the screen darkened, she turned to her colleagues.
"Well?"

An immediate riot of shock and incredulity erupted. One would think that twenty brawling Legionnaires were in the room rather than these normally composed politicians. The President had never heard so many expletives ushered outside of the cage fights she'd refereed in her youth. She was the only one not screaming her head off; amusing that such a reminiscence of her earliest grasp of authority had come back to her now... how well it had set her up for a life of high politics. They needed the moment. She allowed them this, given the portent of what the vile alien had said. But only the moment.

"ENOUGH!" Sudden silence ensued.
Ah, good. She still had it then.

"From your collective tone I take it we are all of one mind? Nothing that this bastard can suggest will be good enough for us, short of the whole damn lot of them eating grenades. Agreed?"

A resounding cheer was given by way of an answer.

That was quick. There really wasn't anything else this council would consider. Her mind working through the possible cause of this intervention, she added, "They are not as sure of themselves as they appear. Why even ask this of us unless they would prefer us to change course? We must take heart from that and we must not falter. Not a step backwards. We are clearly hurting them. Let's continue to do so! We are of one mind?" she asked again. Casting her eyes around the room she was met with nothing but firm nods and even a few grim smiles.

"Good," she said, opening the channel to Dawkins.
"Unlock our outward feed please."

"Done Ma'am."

"Thank you," she said, deactivating her communicator.
She addressed the terrifying visage staring down at them all in a calm, authoritative tone.

"We have considered your offer. We reject it. Utterly. It changes nothing, and we will not rest until we see the last of your vile race purged from the galaxy. For sharing the truth of the Shaltari with us, we offer you this in payment; you can all rest in your foetid graves, sure in the knowledge that once we are done with you, the spiny little maggots will be next. That is all."

Maniacal laughter greeted this statement and for a moment the Scourge actually appeared to be happy. Once it regained some composure, it replied.

"So be it. The personal is distasteful to us, but this one admits to... *satisfaction*, with you. You do not disappoint, and neither shall we."

As he finished, a small crimson light began to pulse in front of the President.
Priority one, the only way to contact the council in seclusion. As if making the point for him, frantic, urgent banging sounded from the back of the room. Someone was hammering on the locked door with all their heart.

The Scourge sneered down from the display.

"You should know this is the Shaltari's third attempt to throw another species into our path in an effort to end us. Mark well the hour that you rejected our clemency, human. Your brave words will soon ring hollow in the ears of those few left when we are done. We are still here. Soon, your race shall not be, save those we choose to keep as pets."

The screen cut to black with his final words. Councillor Paige slammed the door unlock button and Lieutenant Dawkins stumbled in, practically dragging two young signals analysts with her. These two were white as ghosts and looked moments from passing out, while Dawkins appeared on the verge of a heart attack. The second analyst doubled up and collapsed, vomiting as he did so and curling into a foetal ball.

Clearly, they'd run all the way up from Communications to physically barge their way in here and the usually deskbound intellectuals were suffering from more than just shock. Further scrutiny made it clear that they had the blackest of news to convey and that they were dreading giving it voice.
"It's Ferrum... Councillors..." Dawkins stammered.

"That's where the signal came from... it matches... our signal delay patterns perfectly... huge enemy fleet activity detected at the outer markers... projected to reach Ferrum orbit in nine hours. Supreme Marshal Zachiev and Supreme Admiral Halsey are on the line, along with about two hundred other officials, military outposts and planetary officers. All marked top priority: alpha threat level."

President Belaque had never wished for the silence so much in all her life.

Resigned to an even tougher fight than she'd thought they were in already, but far stronger now in her resolve, she rose on steady feet. This was war, and sometimes it was easy to forget that enemies had plans of their own, and no plan survived contact with them. She vowed to make sure that this new gambit from the Scourge did not survive contact with the United Colonies of Mankind. Standing straight and tall, President Belaque strode from the room, the Councillors in her wake.

EPILOGUE

The High Councillor climbed the final set of stairs to the roof of Aurum's High Council building. He'd claimed he'd wanted some air and a little private time to reflect on the day's momentous events before talking to the President about that evening's speech. *Damn this would need to be a good one* he thought. Despite what he was about to do, he was still her friend and did not like to witness the cracks showing in her usually unbreakable psyche. He hoped his dual allegiance would help with that one day. His handlers assured him that it would.

The roof was a good place. Quiet, away from crowds and those damned warning claxons still ringing throughout the building. He'd done well to cultivate this little affectation of spending some alone time up here over the last few years, something he'd become known for. *One of life's little foibles that are accepted for people of intellect and power.* The real reason the roof was a good place was the open sky, no metal or concrete between him and whatever his other masters had circling above.

With a very deliberate thought, he activated his implanted non-metallic neurocommunicator. A damn good job that the UCM had no way of detecting or even being aware of such advanced tech. It meant that he could simply stand here, gazing at the glistening capital below him, all the while talking and giving nothing away to the array of cameras and microphones that would surely be scrutinising him right now.

As he uploaded his memories of the last hour to the circling presence above, he thought,
"They know."

"Will it change their course?" a disembodied voice asked.

"I doubt it," he replied, "hate and revenge are powerful motivators for them."

"As expected," said the voice.

"We will have to step up operations. The clock is ticking Agent. The very future of all life is at stake and we are all that stands between it and annihilation."

"Is it perhaps time to tell them that?" he ventured.

An uncharacteristic pause greeted this question.

"No," was the eventual reply.

"You were there in that room were you not? The focus.The drive.The single mindedness. Don't forget that the Republic was the first enemy voiced in suspicion, not the Shaltari. We must nurture that drive and that hatred. It is serving its purpose and the Viziers see no point in disrupting that.

"They have their primary enemy, let them keep to that for now. It will make them strong for when the time comes. For now you must return to the President. Your intellect and position will help steer her. You continue to perform excellently, Agent. The human race, both enlightened and unenlightened will remember this one day."

With that, the link to his mysterious handler was severed.

With a weary but convicted heart, he began to descend the staircase, back to the panic and the chaos below.